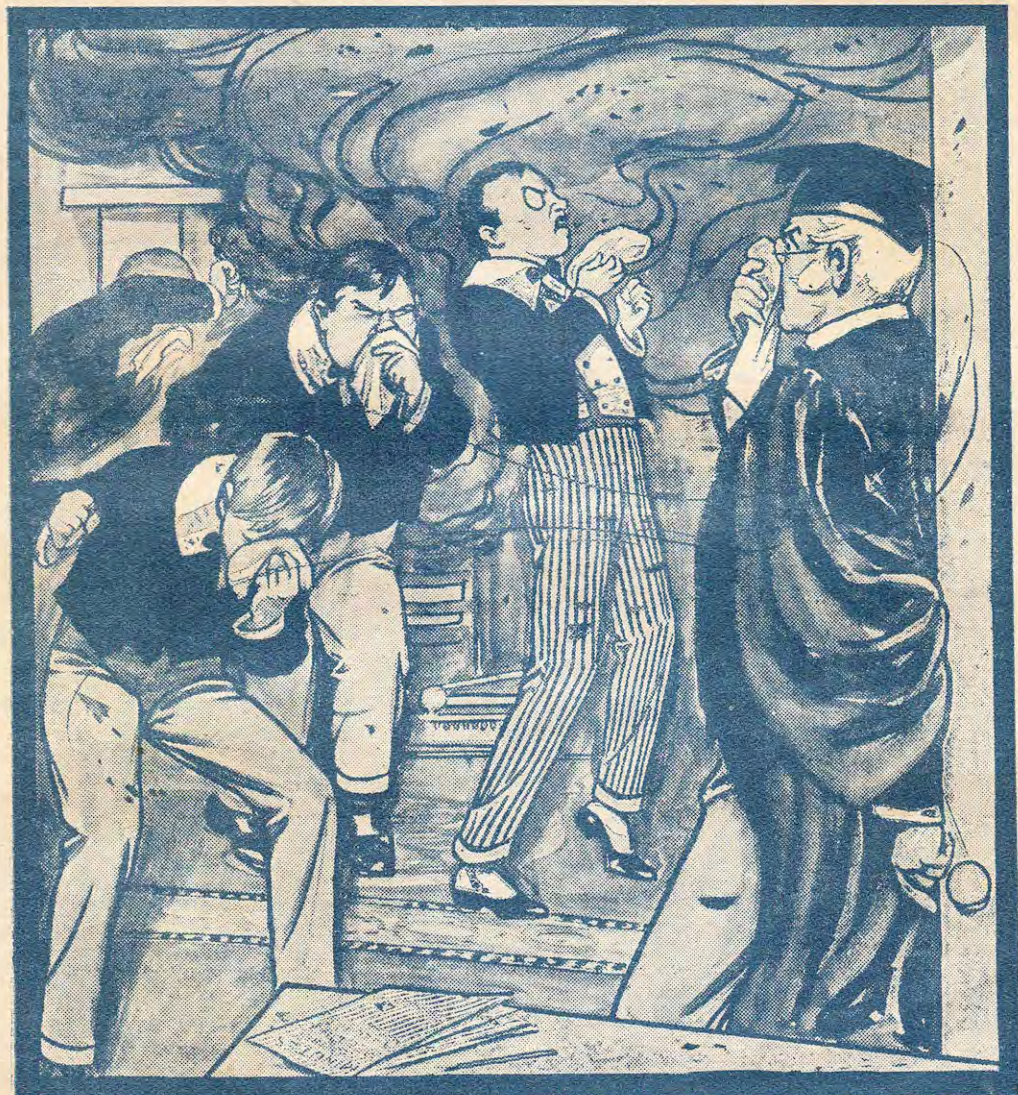


WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



SMOKE IN THE CLUB-ROOM!

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A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. War Problems.

"A T Gweyfwiahs—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arey.

"Any butter?"

"No, Blake, there is no butter. I was remarkin'—"

"Any margarine?"

"No, deah boy! I was goin' to say—"

"Olive oil would do," said Jack Blake. "Is there any?"

"Not that I am aware of, Blake. I have some cycle-lamp oil, if that is any use."

Jack Blake paused, with the frying-pan in his hand, and gave the Honourable Arthur Augustus a basilisk stare.

"You frabjous ass! Do you think I can fry potatoes in cycle-lamp oil?" he demanded.

"Weally, Blake, I was not thinkin' about the mattrah at all. I was goin' to say—"

"Never mind what you were going to say! I dare say you've said it before—you generally have. The question is—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"We've got plenty of murphies," said Blake. "Owing to my bucking you fellows up to work on the allotment, we've got plenty of spuds. But what the merry dickens are we going to fry them in?"

Digby came into Study No. 6, fresh and ruddy from the playing-fields.

"Tea ready?" he inquired.

"Oh, we're getting on that way," answered Blake. "There isn't any tea or sugar, or butter or marg, or coffee or cocoa, but there's lots of spuds!"

"Well, spuds are better than nothing! Fry 'em!"

"That's where the shortage of fats comes in!" grinned Blake. "What are we going to fry them in?"

"The frying-pan."

"Fathead!" roared Blake. "We want grease of some sort."

"Oh, find something," said Digby.

George Herries marched in, with a wrinkle in his brow. Herries looked at the table, bare so far, and granted.

"I thought you were going to have tea ready," he said. "Gussy's been in a long time. What have you been doing, Gussy?"

"I've been thinkin', deah boy. At Gweyfwiahs—"

"For goodness' sake don't start thinkin' now!" said Herries irritably. "There's enough trouble without that."

"Weally, Hewvies—"

"Not that I care twopence about tea," said Herries. "Blow tea! But Towser is looking a bit seedy. He don't seem to like rations."

"Bothah Towser!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Oh, don't be a Hun!" answered Herries. "Blessed if I know what the Government is doing, leaving dogs unprovided for in this way. 'Tain't their war, is it?"

"Well, no! I don't suppose the dogs care very much about cwinshin' Pwnsian militawism and thwings," remarked

Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "It is wathah wuff on the dogs to get mixed up in a war they know nothin' about."

"Odds and ends are getting mighty short now," growled Herries. "Towser don't grumble; he's British to the backbone! But he don't look well on it. I'm worried about Towser."

"Suppose you worry about what we are going to fry these murphies in!" suggested Jack Blake sarcastically.

"Oh! Are you frying them for Towser?"

"No!" roared Blake. "I'm not frying them for Towser!"

"Then don't bother!" grunted Herries.

"Any kind of fat would do!" said Blake.

"Use your head!" suggested Digby.

"Look here, you ass—"

"Let's go without, deah boy!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "It's simply astonishin' the pumbah of things you can go without when you twy!"

"Not even a little bit of sust!" said Blake.

"I never thought the time would come when I'd rather have a bit of sust than a bag of jam-tarts. But it has. War's a queer thing. When it begins, you think it's all khaki and guns and bayonets and things, and after a time you find that it's corn and margarine and suet. Now, these spuds—"

"Bake them in their jackets," said Dig.

"I suppose that's the only thing," said Blake, with a sigh. "Hallo, Tommy!"

Tom Merry looked into Study No. 6.

"Got any marg?" asked Blake.

Tom laughed.

"No. I looked in to see if you'd got any."

"Oh, run away and play!" said Blake, in disgust. "Hallo, Lowther! You got anything of a fatty nature besides your head?"

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"Sorry—no! I was asked ten bob for a bottle of salad-oil in Rylecombe. I offered the man fivepence-halfpenny, but he wouldn't trade. We shall all learn to be tiptop housekeepers at this rate."

"Yaas, wathah! We are weally learnin' things," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"I used to think the way to get things was to telephone to the stores. But that resource has failed us."

"We live upon an isle," sighed Monty Lowther. "But we can't fry potatoes in that ile."

"Oh, don't be funny!" howled Blake. "This is jolly serious!"

"Admitted, deah boy! As Shakespeare remarked—"

"Oh, bother Shakespeare!"

But Monty Lowther, the incurable humorist, had thought of an improvement on Shakespeare, and he proceeded to inflict it upon Study No. 6.

"Who steals my purse steals trash, But he who bleches from me my margarine—"

"Cheese it!"

"Yaas, dwy up!"

"Well, I've got a suggestion to make," said Monty Lowther loudly. "Spread your butter-eard on your war-bread, and put your sugar-ticket in your tea-cups—"

"Ass!"

"Oh, come on, Tommy! It's no good trying to help these grouzers! Let's go and see if Manners has 'dug up any thing."

And Tom Merry and Lowther went their way, leaving Study No. 6 to solve the problem of the fat shortage in their own way unassisted.

Jack Blake proceeded to bake the potatoes over the fire. Digby dissected the war-bread, which had to be cked out with the plentiful murphies. Tea in the study was a problem in these days. Still, it was all to beat the Huns, so Study No. 6 did not really grumble, only sometimes exercising the ancient British privilege of grouching to blow off steam, as it were.

"I have been thinkin' out a wathah seewions question, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, betting in as soon as the fat problem was solved.

Herries glanced at him.

"Have you the right of anything?" he asked hopefully.

"Yaas: I wathah think I have!"

"Go ahead, then!"

"At Gweyfwiahs—"

"Greyfriars!" repeated Herries. "Do you know anybody at Greyfriars who keeps a dog? How does he feed him?"

"I am not talkin' about dogs, Hewvies!"

"You said you'd thought of something, you ass!" exclaimed Herries, whose mind was evidently running on Towser and nations.

"At Gweyfwiahs—"

"I wonder whether a dog could be trained to be a vegetarian?" said Herries. "There are lots of people vegetarians, and they get more than an average of wins in athletics and things like that. But with a dog—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, ring off Towser!" exclaimed Digby. "I'm fed up, old chap, if Towser isn't."

"It's a question of national importance!" scented Herries. "Lots of claps at the Front have left a dog at home, and what do you think they'll feel like if they find the poor beast is wasting away? It's enough to turn them into Pacifists. Now, about Towser—"

"Wing off, Hewvies, for goodness' sake!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Towser will come in useful later, if the war goes on," said Blake, looking round from the baking murphies.

"How do you mean?" asked Herries. "He would be jolly useful if the Huns got here; but they won't!"

"I shouldn't wonder if there's two or three pounds of fat on Towser," said Blake, with a cannibalistic look. "This study has first claim on him when it comes to that. About the flavour I don't know—"

"You—you—your Hun!" roared Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear chap, they're beginning on the horses already, and the cheery old boy-woes will be the next to follow," said Blake. "Why, they eat dogs in China, and like 'em—they're luxuries there. Mind Towser doesn't get too thin!"

Herries' face was a study. He was at a loss for words; and Arthur Augustus chimed in cheerily:

"At Gweyfwiahs—"

"Get the table laid," said Blake. "These spuds are nearly done, and I'm as hungry as a hunter. Chuck chinwag, Gussy, and make yourself useful."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Get a move on, and give your lower jaw a rest, old chap!"

Arthur Augustus sniffed, but he got a move on. Study No. 6 sat down to tea—a little war-bread and a good deal of baked potatoes. They could have had a better tea in Hall; but tea in the study was a cherished institution, not lightly to be given up. The chief regret was that the study funds did not run to kippers.

CHAPTER 2.

A Difference of Opinion.

"**N**OW, deah boys—" "Pass the salt, Gussy. Luckily, salt isn't short, and it's good for the health, you know," remarked Blake.

"And lots of water," grinned Digby. "Water's a very healthy drink, I believe."

"Yaas, wathah! But as I was saying, at Gweyfwiahs—"

"Can't you give Greyfriars a rest, Gussy?"

"But I was goin' to point out—"

"If you want all the spuds, Gussy—"

Arthur Augustus passed the potatoes. "Now, deah boys, pway give me your attention! At Gweyfwiahs they have some customs different from ours."

"Most schools have different customs," yawned Blake. "What does that matter?"

"I wathah think we are ahead of them in most things—"

"Passed unanimously!"

"But in one respect, Blake, I think we might weally do well to bowwow a custom from Gweyfwiahs."

"Rats!"

"Pway don't say 'Wats!' till you have heard my ideah, Blake! At Gweyfwiahs ewvery Form has its own captain."

"Does it?"

"Yaas, wathah! Wharton, you know, is captain of the Wemove—that's the Lowah Fourth. A chap named Temple is captain of the Fourth. I believe even the Third Form, the fags, you know, have some sort of a skipphag. Now, at St. Jim's it has neval been the custom to have a weal Form captain below the Shell. I do not think that is a good ideah—it is twatwin' the Fourth like fags."

"Well, the Fourth are fags!" remarked Herries.

"That isn't the point, Hewvies. The Shell are fags, if you come to that, though they call themselves Middle School. My ideah is that the Fourth Form ought to have a captain, the same as at Gweyfwiahs."

Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed his chums, to see what impression his announcement had made.

To his satisfaction, he saw that the impression was a good one.

Blake and Herries and Digby all nodded together.

"Not a bad ideah," said Blake, as he started on his third potato. "Of course,

a lot depends on the chap who's selected as Form captain."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Right enough!" said Herries heartily. "What would be wanted would be a really athletic chap, big enough to make the fellows toe the line."

"Oh, he might be little, but good!" said Digby. "Character is the chief thing."

"Yaas, I agree that a fellow's chawvach has a lot to do with it," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, the Fourth would have to vote on it. We are all democvatic in these days. But, of course, thoughtless fellows would want instructiv' how to vote—it wouldn't do for some New House boundah to get in as Form captain."

"No fear!"

"In fact, I must say that I think the captain of the Fourth ought to be selected from this study."

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, I believe in free and equal votes; but it is necessary to guard against mistakes, same as in politics. People are allowed to vote at elections, you know; but they can only vote for candidates set up from among membahs of the wulin' classes. I wegard that as a vewy good ideah. Pwactically speakin', this study represents the wulin' class in the Fourth—"

"Hear, hear!"

"You agree with me, deah boys, that the Form captain is bound to come from this study?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good! Then I can depend on your support?"

"Eh?"

"You will vote for me—"

"You!"

"Yaas, wathah! Haven't you already agreed that the Form captain must come from this study?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently.

Blake gave him a withering look.

"I thought you were alluding to me," he answered.

"Bai Jove!" Whyevah should you have thought that, Blake? What a vewy peculiar ideah for you to entahtain!"

"Yes; I must say that that's rather thick," said Herries. "What's wanted is a big, athletic chap—"

"Ain't I athletic?" demanded Blake warmly.

"Oh, yes, in your way! But a fellow like me, frinstance—"

"You!" ejaculated Blake. "Well, of all the cheeky asses—"

"Oh, come, Herries!" chimed in Digby. "You're big enough—at least, your feet are—but a job like that don't depend on the size of a chap's feet. A medium-sized fellow with brains—"

"Yaas, wathah! I am glad to see that I have your support, Dig—"

"Oh, don't be funny, Gussy! If the Form captain is to come from this study, there isn't much doubt which fellow it ought to be."

"No doubt at all," said Blake. "Me!"

"That's only your conceit, old chap!" answered Digby. "You're all very well in your way. I like you as a pal, but as Form captain—draw the line somewhere, you know. I shall certainly expect you to vote for me!"

"You?" yelled Blake.

"Well, why not?" demanded Robert Arthur Digby warmly.

"There are about a hundred weasons why not, Dig," said Arthur Augustus gently. "I will not ennumerate them, as it might hurt your feelin's. Now, I weally must point out that it was my ideah in the first place—"

"Borrowed from Greyfriars!"

"Weally, Hewvies—"

Jack Blake, having finished his potato, rose to his feet.

"Now, look here, you fellows!" he said. "This is a good ideah—a really good ideah! I'm rather surprised that I didn't think of it myself. Form captain will have to be a School House fellow, so that he can make the New House cads toe the line. Now, who's leader of this study?"

"Well, I've heard you call yourself leader," remarked Digby, in a reflective sort of way. "We've let you run on."

"Simply from politeness, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'm leader of this study, and I'm prepared to give a jolly good thick ear to any chap who says I'm not!"

"Force is not argument, Blake. That is sheeah Pwussianism."

"Besides, you couldn't give me a thick ear," said Herries, in a matter-of-fact way. "What's the good of talking about impossibilities?"

"Why, you ass—"

"Well, your fathhead—"

"I could give you half a dozen!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! How could you give Hewvies half a dozen thick eeahs, Blake, when Hewvies has only two eeahs?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I wufuse to be called an ass, Blake!"

"Look here—"

"Wats!"

"Rats!"

Voices in Study No. 6 were growing warm and excited. The door was thrown open, and the Terrible Three of the Shell smiled in. Tom Merry waved a chiding hand at the excited Fourth-Formers.

"What's the matter, kids?" he asked soothingly. "Let your Uncle Tom decide! Now, then, don't all speak at once!"

"We've decided to have a Form captain in the Fourth," said Jack Blake. "Now, I put it to the Shell-fish, as disinterested parties, can there be any question about my taking on the job?"

"I appeal to your common-sense, Tom Mewwy! Ought not a Form-captain to be a fellow of tact and judgment?"

"Look at me!" said Herries. "If I'm not cut out for the job, who is?"

The Terrible Three stared.

"A Form-captain in the Fourth?" exclaimed Manners.

"That's the ideah!" said Digby. "And I think—"

"You don't think, or you wouldn't think that a good ideah," said Monty Lowther kindly. "Speaking as a representative of the Middle School, I disapprove of anything of the kind."

"What?"

"Fags mustn't put on such airs," explained Lowther. "Now, you Fourth-Form kids—"

"You cheeky ass!"

"Drop it!" advised Tom Merry. "It's no good. When you want a skipper you can come to me. The Fourth don't want a skipper on its own. I don't approve of these new-fangled ideahs. It's almost Socialism! Look up to your pastors and masters with proper respect. That's the Shell—"

Study No. 6 might, and did, disagree on their respective claims to the captaincy of the Fourth Form. But there was one point they agreed upon—that they weren't going to stand any cheek from the Shell.

Without replying to Tom Merry's arguments, Study No. 6 made a sudden charge at the Terrible Three.

"Sock in to 'em!" roared Herries.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look here—"

"Yaas, wathah! Thwash the boundahs!"

There was a terrific combat in the doorway of Study No. 6. But four to three were too many, and the Terribles

Three were strewn along the passage, roaring.

Then Blake & Co. returned into their quarters, rather breathlessly, to resume the discussion of the knotty point, without any further advice from the Shell.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins is On.

GEORGE FIGGINS came into his study in the New House, with a somewhat excited expression on his face. Figgins of the Fourth had news.

Kerr and Wynn, his inseparable chums, were in the study. Kerr had a cricket-stump in his hand, and Fatty Wynn wore an aggrieved expression. "You're late for tea, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn reproachfully.

"I've been hearing something," said Figgins. "What on earth are you doing with that stump, Kerr?"

Kerr chuckled. "That's for Fatty!" he explained. "There wouldn't have been any Tommy left for you if I hadn't taken the stump to him."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I was simply going to sample the herrings, to—to see whether they were well done—"

"Yes; I know what your sampling means," said Figgins. "Pile in, Fatty, and look a little less like a hungry cannibal, if you can."

Figgins & Co. sat down to tea. Fatty Wynn's plump face brightened up then. Figgins looked thoughtful.

"I've heard some jaw over in the School House," he remarked. "About the rations?" asked Wynn, with his mouth full.

"Oh, bother the rations!" said Figgins testily. "Do you think everybody's thinking about grub, like you, Fatty? You get enough to eat. Can't you be satisfied with that?"

"Enough!" echoed Fatty. "Oh, don't be funny, Figgins! It's months and months and months since I've had enough! Look how thin I'm getting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins and Kerr. Fatty Wynn's thinness certainly was not visible to the eye.

"Yes, you can cackle!" said Fatty, more in sorrow than in anger. "I'm wasting away. Of course, I don't complain. I'm ready to die in the last ditch, if it comes to that!"

"So long as the ditch is well stocked with grub!" grunted Figgins. "And then you'd die of over-eating!"

"Look here, you skinny ass—"

"Oh, shush! Give the grub question a rest. We get enough of that in the food economy lectures. They've got a new wheeze in the School House."

"Somebody standing a feed?" asked Fatty, his eyes glistening. "If they ask us, I hope you won't start any rot, Figgy. I don't believe in these House rows being carried on in war-time. I think—"

"It's not a feed!" roared Figgins.

"Oh!" said Fatty, his interest in the matter completely evaporating. "Bother the School House! I don't think much of School House wheezes, anyway. Do you fellows want any more of these herrings?"

"Yes!"

"Oh! Ahem! All right!"

It seems to have started in Study No. 6," resumed Figgins. "But all the Fourth over there are jabbering about it. The idea is to have a captain in the Fourth—a Form captain, you know. They say they've got that at Greyfriars. Not that we want to adopt foreign customs here. Still, it's not a bad idea, so long as the right sort of chap is made skipper."

"Good idea!" said Kerr.

"I thought you'd think so. You see, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 532.

the Shell has a skipper—Tom Merry. Of course, properly speaking, I am captain of the Fourth."

"Blake says—"

"Blake's a cheeky School House ass!" said Figgins warmly.

"Agreed!" said Kerr, laughing.

"You see, in Form matches—Fourth against Shell—it's never really settled who captains the Fourth," went on Figgins. "Sometimes Blake, sometimes myself, and even other chaps, have a look-in. That isn't as it should be. My idea is to pick out the best chap for the job, and let him stick to it. That's efficiency."

"Is that the School House idea?"

"Well, no. They think a School House chap ought to have the job."

"Ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to chortle at in that remark, Kerr. Now, I believe the wheeze is going to catch on; and, of course, the New House has got to see to it that the job is well-filled. We've got to bag it, in fact."

"School House outvotes us in an election," remarked Fatty Wynn. "It's bound to go by election."

"But a House divided against itself can't stand," grinned Figgins, "and nearly every School House chap in the Fourth thinks he's cut out for skipper. I hear that everybody in No. 6 is setting up as a candidate. And Mulvaney minor thinks an Irish chap ought to be Form captain, and Reilly is certain that an Ulsterman is wanted, and Macdonald says that if there's a Form captain at all it's bound to be a Scotsman, or something will go wrong."

"Something in that," said Kerr.

"Oh, trust a blessed Scotsman to back up another blessed Scotsman!" said Figgins warmly. "Anybody would think you silly Scots were all twin brothers, the way you back one another up! I suppose you don't want a School House bouncer as Form captain, even if he is Scotch."

"No fear!"

"Well, that's all right, then."

"But Macdonald might back me up—"

"You!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Yes. Why not?"

Figgins stared.

"Oh!" he said. "I never thought of that!"

Figgins' face was a study for a moment, and Kerr burst into a laugh.

"All serene, Figgy! I was only pulling your leg," he said. "I'm backing you up, of course. So is Fatty."

"Well, a chap ought to be backed up in his own study," said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

"Still, if you hanker after the job, Kerr—"

"Don't, fathead! I wouldn't take it at any price!" answered Kerr. "Don't be an ass, Figgy!"

"Well, I shouldn't like you against me," confessed Figgins. "Lots of the chaps would vote for you as junior House captain if you set up for it against me. I know that."

"Well, they won't have the chance! You're the man for that job, and for the job of Form captain," said Kerr reassuringly. "And if the School House are all at sixes and sevens about it, we've got a good chance of getting you in. New House Fourth have got to vote as one man."

"Yes, that's what I'm thinking; and if the School House vote is split we shall beat them all along the line!" said Figgins eagerly. "We've got to set to work at once. We may bag some School House votes, too. Some of those fellows may see that it's not a party question, but a question of getting a really good man. We must do some electioneering, and use some tact."

"We'll get a prefect to take a hand in the job," said Kerr sagely. "That will give it a tone. And while the School House duifers are quarrelling about their rival claims we'll go ahead and make all the arrangements. That will take the matter out of their hands."

"Good egg! We'll ask Monteith," agreed Figgins. "If you've finished tea we'll go along and speak to Reddy about it."

"I haven't finished," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, you never have finished!" said Figgins. "Come on, Kerr!"

Figgins and Kerr left the study, leaving Fatty Wynn to reduce the tea-table to the state of Mother Hubbard's celebrated cupboard.

They proceeded to Redfern's study, where they found Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence deep in an interesting discussion. The discussion ceased as the two juniors looked in.

"Hallo!" said Redfern.

"Have you heard the new wheeze over the way, Reddy?"

"Yes; just talking about it."

"Good! Of course, you fellows see that, in a matter of this kind, the New House Fourth have got to stand shoulder to shoulder!" said Figgins. "No divisions in face of the enemy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm glad you see that," said Figgins, gratified. "We've had our little disputes in the House, Reddy; but I was sure you'd back me up as a real patriot when it came to dishing the School House. It's understood that every man on this side votes for the New House candidate!"

"Agreed!"

"Then I can put your name down to begin with?"

"Hold on a minute," said Redfern cheerfully. "Am I to understand that you are backing me up as Form captain, Figgy?"

"You?" roared Figgins. "Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Didn't you come here to assure me of your support?"

"You silly ass! Look here!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly. "We're not going to have our vote split like the School House vote. Every chap in the New House Fourth has got to toe the line. That's the way to dish them over the way. If you chaps are going to set up as Conches—"

"What!" roared Redfern & Co., wrathfully.

"Conches!" snorted Figgins. "A chap who don't back up his own side against the enemy is a Conchy."

"Why, you cheeky chump, you've just said you're not going to back me up!"

"That's not the point. I'm the candidate—"

"Your mistake! I'm the candidate!"

"If you want a thick ear, Reddy—"

"If you want to go out on your neck, Figgins—"

"Look here—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Chuck 'em out!" exclaimed Owen, jumping up.

"I'd like to see you chuck me out!" roared Figgins.

Figgins did not mean that statement to be taken literally; but if he wanted to see it, he certainly saw it, for the next moment he was stewing the passage with Kerr, and the door was slammed on them.

Figgins jumped up in great wrath.

"Come on, Kerr! Let's mop up the study!"

Kerr caught his excited chum by the arm.

"Hold on, Figgy—"

"I'm going to mop them up!" roared Figgins.

"That isn't the way to get votes," said Kerr soothingly. "Never mind, Reddy, let's make a round of the fellows before he does, and then speak to Monteith."

Figgins unwillingly assented, and the chums, having dusted themselves, proceeded downstairs. They met Pratt of the Fourth on the landing.

"What was that row about?" asked Pratt.

"That cheeky ass, Reddy, is thinking of setting up as Form captain," said Figgins hotly.

"Oh, what a nerve!" exclaimed Pratt indignantly.

"Yes, you see that?" said Figgins.

"Yes, rather!"

"You won't vote for him, Pratt, old fellow?" said Kerr, with all the sweetness of an experienced electioneer.

"Oh, I shan't be voting," said Pratt.

"Why not?"

"Candidate can't vote!"

"Candidate?" yelled Figgins.

"Yes, I'm setting up as candidate," said Pratt innocently. "I really think I'm the chap for the job. Will you fellows vote for me? Can I put your names down?"

Figgins and Kerr did not answer that question in words. They seized the ineffable Pratt, and bumped him on the landing, and went downstairs, leaving Pratt sitting and gasping, in a state of great astonishment.

It certainly looked as if the New House vote would be split!

CHAPTER 4. Captains Galore.

"**CHEEK!**"

Tom Merry made that remark.

The Terrible Three had come down from their study after prep, and they found several fellows round the notice-board in the hall. They joined the crowd, to see what was on.

There was a new paper on the board in the handwriting of Monteith, the captain of the New House. It was a copy of a similar paper posted up in the New House, and it ran:

"AN ELECTION will shortly be held of a Form captain in the Fourth Form. Candidates are requested to send in their names to the undersigned, who will make arrangements for the election."

"J. MONTEITH."

"Check!" repeated Tom Merry warily. "What do they want with a captain in the Fourth?"

"It's really mutiny!" said Manners.

"Bolshivism!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"And they've got a prefect to take a hand in the game," remarked Kangaroo of the Shell. "Monteith must be an ass!"

"I suppose they've talked him round," said Tom. "He thinks it's a serious bizzny. And—"

"It isn't!"

"Exactly!"

"Wats!" chimed in the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The matiah is vewy sevius, deah boys. The Shell have a captain—"

"But the Shell's the Shell," remarked Tabbot, with a laugh.

"Yaas, but the Fourth is the Fourth!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "You fellows weally seem to be cwusted old Towies. On some ware occasions you have beaten the Fourth at footah, owin' to the lack of a weally good Form captain in the Fourth. That is goin' to be changed. If I get in as skippah—"

"Then the beatings will become less rare?" asked Lowther.

"I suppose they've talked him round," said Tom. "He thinks it's a serious bizzny. And—"

"It isn't!"

"Exactly!"

"Wats!" chimed in the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The matiah is vewy sevius, deah boys. The Shell have a captain—"

"But the Shell's the Shell," remarked Tabbot, with a laugh.

"Yaas, but the Fourth is the Fourth!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "You fellows weally seem to be cwusted old Towies. On some ware occasions you have beaten the Fourth at footah, owin' to the lack of a weally good Form captain in the Fourth. That is goin' to be changed. If I get in as skippah—"

"Then the beatings will become less rare?" asked Lowther.



Figgins & Co. at Home.
(See Chapter 3.)

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothin' of the sort, Lowther—quite the weverse!"

"We really can't allow this," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "The Fourth will be getting their ears up."

"Fathead!" chimed in Blake of the Fourth. "You wait till I'm Form captain, and the Shell will have to creep away and own up they're no good. I intend to take junior footer and cricket practically into my own hands, as captain of the Fourth."

"Wats, Blake—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to dwy up, Blake! I considah—"

"Oh, here you are!" Levison and Cardew and Clive, the chums of Study No. 9, came along. "Looking for you," continued Levison. "Which candidate is Study No. 6 going to vote for?"

"I'm your man," said Cardew.

"You, you ass!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"Yes; but if you prefer to vote for Levison—"

"Levison!"

"Or Clive—"

"Clive?" gasped Blake.

"Yes. We're all three candidates!" explained Cardew calmly. "We can't agree as to one another's merits, so we're all puttin' in."

"Bai Jove!"

"I fancy Roylance will back me up," remarked Sidney Clive. "As a fellow Colonial, Roylance—"

Roylance, the new junior from New Zealand, grinned.

"I was going to ask you the same question," he remarked.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Is all the Fourth going to set up as candidate? It will be like a Texas regiment—all colonels and no privates!"

"I wegard this as utahly wiculous," exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I have hithahto wegarded you as a sensible

chap, Clive—and you also, Woylance—but weally—"

"Sorry I can't say the same to you, old fellow!" said Clive.

"Bai Jove!"

"But I say, who gave a New House prefect any right to chip in?" demanded Herries. "We don't want the thing run by the New House!"

"Well, it's got to be run by somebody," remarked Blake. "It's a good idea to have a Sixth Form chap at the head of it, as you silly kids keep on disputing. I think I'll walk over and give my name to Monteith now."

"I'll come with you, deah boy."

"Same here!"

"Come on, all the merry family!"

grinned Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake snorted.

"Do stop playing the giddy ox!" he exclaimed. "School House Fourth are expected to vote for me—"

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"Wats! I wepeat, wats!"

"Any chap who comes over with me will get a prize thick ear!" roared Blake, and he stalked away in great dudgeon.

"Pewwaps it would be wisah not to cwowd Monteith out," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely.

"Might get the boot if you do!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Wats! Now, I am goin' to take down the names of my supporters," said Arthur Augustus, taking out a beautiful Russia-leather pocket-book and a silver pencil. "Don't all speak at once! Who is the first?"

There was an unanimous silence.

"You, Hewwies!"

"Rats!"

"You, Dig—"

"Bosh!"

"You, Weilly—"

"Sure, I'm a candidate, you duffer!"

"What about you, Kewwuish?"

"I'm backing up Roylance," said the Manx junior, laughing.

"Ye gods! Here's a chap who isn't a candidate!" exclaimed Monty Lowther; and there was a chortle.

"I say, Contarini, old chap—" Contarini, the Italian junior, came up with a smile on his dusky face.

"You are supportin' me, Jackeymo?" "With pleasure, amico!" answered Giacomo, who was always politeness itself.

"Well, that's a beginnin'," said Arthur Augustus, with satisfaction.

"Hold on, Jackeymo!" exclaimed Dick Roylance warmly. "You're in my study—you ought to support me!"

Contarini nodded.

"I shall be very pleased, amico mio!"

"You can't support both!" howled Levison.

"Perche non—why not, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha! You have to vote, you see!" chuckled Tom Merry. "You can't vote for both candidates. You have to put up your hand for one or the other."

"Zen I will put up both hands, as they are both my friends."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Woylance, I pwotest against your twyn' to steal away my votahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "I should be sowwy to twash you—"

"You would—if you started!" agreed Roylance.

"Bai Jove, I wogard that remark as impertinent, Woylance, and unless you withdraw it immediately I shall have no resource but to give you a faithful thwash!"

"This way for the dog-fight!" shouted Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Contarini, I wely on your support—"

"Si, si, amico!"

"I'm relying on you, Jackeymo!" exclaimed Roylance.

"Si, si!"

"Dwy up, Woylance!"

"Ring off, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to wing off, and I uttably decline to have my supportahs cownpwyed by you! Sheeah off at once, or I shall sheeah you off!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Go it!" roared the Shell fellows, in great delight, as Arthur Augustus started the somewhat difficult task of sheering off Roylance.

There was a ring at once, the juniors forgetting that the hall was not quite a suitable place for fistcuffs. Mr. Railton came striding along from his study.

"What is this disturbance?"

"Oh, cumbwies!"

The juniors vanished in all directions.

"D'Arcy! Roylance! Take a hundred lines each!" exclaimed the Housemaster sternly. "If there is any repetition of this—"

But the rival candidates were gone.

CHAPTER 5.

A Good Thing for Trimble.

THE next day there was considerable excitement in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. Shell fellows smiled superior.

But the Fourth were taking the new wheeze very seriously.

All the Fourth, in both House, agreed that it was an excellent idea to have a Form captain, like the upper Forms. It was the custom at Greyfriars. That, as a matter of fact, did not really recommend the idea to the St. Jim's fellows, for nobody is more conservative than the schoolboy. But on its own merits it was a good idea, the Fourth-Formers considered.

There was no doubt, for instance, that

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in cricket and footer the Shell had taken the lead. That might easily have been explained by the fact that the Shell were naturally an older Form, and somewhat bigger fellows. The Shell, however, explained it by the undoubted truth—undoubted in the Shell, that is—that they were footballers and cricketers, and the Fourth weren't. And the Fourth, now, were inclined to attribute it to the fact that they hadn't a really good Form captain; because, personally, they could play the Shell heads off. And quite certainly there was something to be said for the Fourth view. That Form really had a larger proportion of athletes than the Shell.

There was a lot of agreement, and a lot of disagreement, in the Fourth, on this burning question. They all agreed that the best fellow for the job had better get in as Form captain. But a considerable number of the Fourth were convinced that the best fellow was—well, each candidate had his own opinion about that!

Monteith of the Sixth had been kept busy over in the New House, taking down the names of candidates.

The New House prefect had good-naturedly acceded to Figgy's request to take the matter in hand; but probably he had not realised what a difference of opinion there was on the subject. He had expected to hear of two candidates, or three, or four at the most. As the list lengthened, Monteith ceased to regard the matter seriously at all.

It was understood that the list of candidates was to be posted up in the New House that evening; and certainly the list was likely to be a long one.

Arguments on the subject were somewhat excited. After morning lessons Jack Blake had looked in on Levison & Co., and asked them, as decent chaps, to back him up for the captaincy of the Form. They retorted by asking him, as a decent chap, to back them up—each of them. The argument had ended uproariously, and Cardew was seen afterwards with a red nose, and Blake was spotted dabbing at his eye in the dormitory.

Arthur Augustus was also pushing his candidature. He tried to make the fellows understand that a fellow of tact and judgment was required, and that he, the Honourable Arthur Augustus, possessed the requisite tact and judgment in great profusion. Replies took such forms as "Rats!" and "Bow-wow!"—which, as Gussy justly complained, were not arguments at all.

Polite and obliging fellows, like Contarini, promised their support to every candidate who asked for it; but such support was not really very reliable.

There were one or two fellows who scented a good thing in the election. Baggy Trimble turned it over in his fat mind during lessons, somewhat to the annoyance of Mr. Latham, who not unreasonably expected lessons to be attended to in lesson-time. Baggy was grinning a fat grin when he rolled out of the Form-room, his podgy mind made up. He fastened upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the passage.

"Gussy, old fellow—" he began.

Arthur Augustus opened his lips to bid Trimble make himself scarce. He simply could not stand being called Gussy by Trimble. But he closed them again. Trimble was a voter in the Fourth. A vote was not to be despised, however much "despision," so to speak, he might feel for the voter.

"Yaas, dear boy," said Gussy, with forced politeness.

"I hear you're putting up as Form captain!"

Arthur Augustus quite smiled.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I feel that I ought to vote for you, as an old pal," said Trimble.

The swell of St. Jim's writhed.

Even for the sake of Trimble's vote he could not allow the podgy youth to claim him as an old pal. Gussy was new to electioneering; and he was not prepared to go the lengths of a political candidate.

"Weally, Twimble, you exaggerate!" he said. "I should be very pleased if you would vote for me, but you are not weally a pal of mine."

"Seeing that I knew you before I came to St. Jim's, I feel that something's due to old friendship, Gussy."

"Oh, dear!" said Gussy. Trimble had met him at a seaside place before he came to St. Jim's, and on the strength of that he had arrived at the school as an old friend of D'Arcy's.

"I've thought it over, and I'm going to support you," said Trimble.

"Thank you, Twimble! But—"

"I'm convinced," went on Baggy, with great seriousness, "that what the Fourth wants is a fellow of tact and judgment as Form captain."

Arthur Augustus beamed. After all, he reflected, Trimble wasn't such a bad fellow in his way, though he was a bit of a food-bog.

"I quite agree with you, Twimble," he said heartily. "I shall be vewy much honahed if you vote for me."

"Rely on me!" said Baggy.

"I will, dear boy. I will put your name down at once."

Trimble blinked at him as he wrote the name down in the Russia-leather pocket-book.

"By the way, Gussy—"

"Yaas?" asked Arthur Augustus, letting the familiarity pass.

"I believe you had a remittance this morning?"

"Ya-a-as."

"Could you lend me half-a-crown?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his celebrated monocle into his eye and scanned Trimble's fat face.

"Weally, Twimble," he said slowly, "you are well awnah that I lend money only to my friends."

"Well, I'm your friend, ain't I?" said Trimble, unabashed.

"It is wathah awkward for me to make you a loan just now, Trimble, as it would look like bwyewy and cownpwyon."

"Look here, you know—"

"Of course, I do not mean to hint that it would make any difference to your votin'," said Arthur Augustus hastily.

"Of—of course not! Besides, it's only a loan. I'm expecting a cheque from my pater at Trimble Hall shortly."

"Bai Jove!"

"I shall settle up on Saturday by the latest. In fact, before if Talbot settles up for a quid I lent him yesterday."

D'Arcy's brow grew stern.

"You did not lend Talbot a quid, Twimble! I object vewy strongly to your tellin' me such whoppahs!"

"Ahem! I mean Skimpole—"

"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy, if you can't lend me half-a-crown—"

"I will lend you half-a-crown, Twimble, if you give me your word of honah that it will make no difference to your votin'."

"Certainly! Honour bright!"

"There you are, Twimble."

"Thanks!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, as Trimble scuttled off, Blake coming up just then.

"Bribing the voters, Gussy?"

"I wewiduate that accusation with feahful scorn, Blake!" exclaimed the swell of the Fourth hotly. "Twimble has bowwowed half-a-crown of me, assurin' me that it will make no difference to his vote."

"I'll see about that!" remarked Blake.

He ran Trimble down in the quad on his way to the tuckshop. The fat Fourth-Former yelped as Jack Blake caught his shoulder.

"Ow!"

"How are you going to vote in the form election?" demanded Blake sternly.

"For you, old chap!" said Trimble at once.

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake, taken rather aback.

"You're the man for the place," assured Trimble. "I should think even the New House duffers could see that. It's you first, and the rest nowhere. That's my opinion, for what it's worth."

"A jolly sensible opinion!" said Blake, much mollified. "But what about that half-crown you've just squeezed out of Gussy?"

Trimble grinned a fat grin.

"I promised Gussy not to let that make any difference," he answered. "By the way, Blake, I want to send five bob to a wounded soldier fund. Can you lend me half-a-crown to put to this?"

"Yes; and I'll come with you and get the postal order, and see you send it off!" said Blake.

"The fact is, I—I'd rather take it personally—"

"Right-ho! I'll come with you!"

"Ahem! I—I think—" stammered Trimble.

"You think you can spoof me, you fat rotter!" growled Blake. "Sit down!"

"Look here—Yaroooh!" roared Trimble, as he sat down in the quad, with Blake's forcible assistance. "Yow-ow-ow! I won't vote for you now! Yah!"

Blake walked away. It was a vote lost, perhaps, but Trimble's vote was a very doubtful one.

"Hallo! Let me help you up, old fellow!"

It was Cardew of the Fourth, and Cardew gave Trimble a hand, and set him on his feet, gasping.

CHAPTER 6.

Baggy Takes the Cake.

TRIMBLE blinked at Cardew in surprise.

It was the first time that the grandson of Lord Rockness had ever awarded any politeness on Baggy Trimble.

Trimble had wasted a great deal on Cardew, being very keen to number a nobleman's son among his pals. But it had been a sheer waste. Ralph Rockness Cardew would not, as a rule, have touched Baggy Trimble with a barge-pole.

Trimble was astonished for a moment, and then he grinned as he realised that Cardew must be a candidate after his vote.

"Shall I dust you down?" asked Cardew considerably.

"Thanks, old chap! You're awfully good, Cardew!"

"Call me Ralph!" said Cardew urbanely. "I'll call you Baggy if you like. Your name's Baggy, isn't it?"

"Baggy," answered Trimble.

"Yaus, I mean Baggy."

"I say, you're a candidate?"

"How did you guess that?" smiled Cardew.

"I'm going to vote for you."

"Thanks awfully!"

"Could you lend me five bob?"

"I was just goin' to ask you if you'd been disappointed about a remittance?"

answered Cardew. "Remember me to your pater when you write again, Trimble. My grandfather would like to

meet him. Do you think it could be arranged?"

Trimble beamed.

"Certainly, old fellow! My pater would be delighted."

"It's a go, then."

Baggy Trimble blinked at the five shillings in his palm as Cardew sauntered away. Money was nothing to Ralph Rockness Cardew, who had more of it than was good for him.

Baggy rolled into the tuckshop, in search of anything that was not controlled, and the shillings followed one another at a great rate. When he came out he met George Herries in the quad, and approached him with a beaming smile.

"Cut off!" growled Herries.

For a candidate, Herries certainly had no tact. But he simply could not stand Trimble. Trimble had been heard to say that dogs ought to be killed now grub was short—which was exactly the view Trimble might have been expected to take. And the idea of Powder being killed, while a worm like Trimble was left alive, filled Herries with inexplicable indignation.

"I say, Herries—"

"Don't!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't say! Cut off!"

"But you're a candidate—"

"I don't want you to vote," answered Herries grimly. "I wouldn't be found dead with it! I'll biff you if you don't cut off!"

Trimble decided to cut off.

He ran down Robert Arthur Digby next. He poked Robert Arthur affectionately in the ribs, receiving a glare in exchange.

"Dig, old fellow, I've made up my mind to vote for you," he said.

"Oh, good!" said Dig, thawing. "I'll take your name down."

"Have you got a bob about you?"

Dig slipped his pencil back into his pocket.

"I've got a boot!" he said.

Trimble did not wait for the boot. He seemed to have no luck with Study No. 6 at all. His next victim was Dick Roylance, whom he intercepted on his way from Little Side.

"Hold on a minute, Roylance!" purred Baggy. "Do you agree with me that we ought to have a Colonial chap as Form captain in the Fourth?"

"You bet!" answered Roylance.

"Then it's between you and Clive," said Baggy. "Which would you advise a chap to vote for, Roylance?"

"New Zealand," said Roylance promptly.

"I think so, too, considering the Anzacs, and—and the frozen mutton, and all that," said Trimble. "Put my name down, Roylance, I'm your man. It will be a leg-up for the Fourth to have an Anzac skipper. By the way, have you seen Figgins?"

"No."

"I lent him five bob, and he hasn't settled up yet," explained Baggy.

"Could you lend me five bob till Figgins settles up, Roylance?"

"The New Zealand junior looked at him steadily."

"Car! I give you five bob for your vote, do you mean?" he asked. "No, I can't; but I can give you a shake for being a sneaking little toad!"

And he did.

"Yoop!" roared Trimble, as he shook like a jelly in Roylance's sturdy grasp.

"I didn't mean—yarooch—I say—yawn!"

Roylance left him trying to get his wind back. It was absolutely certain that Baggy Trimble would not vote for New Zealand after that.

At tea-time Baggy Trimble meandered

into the New House. He had had his tea early, but he was ready for another—for several others, in fact, if he could get them. He smiled in at Figgins' study.

George Figgins was about to command him to "bunk," when he remembered in time how necessary it was to get the School House Fourth to vote for the right man. He smiled instead.

"Come in, kid!" he said.

"Oh, do!" said Kerr blandly. "So kind of you to give us a look-in, Trimble."

"Sorry we can't ask you to tea," said Fatty Wynn. Fatty did not want any mistake to be made upon that point.

Figgins gave him a warning frown.

"Dry up, Fatty!" he said. "Would you care to stay to tea, Trimble?"

Well, since you're so pressing," said Baggy amiably. "I really came over to speak to you about the election. I've been thinking that, in a matter of this kind, a chap isn't under any obligation to vote for his own House. What do you fellows think?"

Figgins smiled sweetly.

"Exactly," he answered. "A fellow must think of the School, not of the House, in a matter of this kind. Sit down, old boy."

Kerr politely pulled out a chair for Trimble, who sat down cheerily. Fatty Wynn was dumb with dismay. Hospitality was all very well, but the study was on war-rations. That evening the rations were amplified by a cake from home, and three handsome kippers, and a pot of jam. It was a rare occasion.

Fatty Wynn could not help suspecting that Trimble had discovered that there was a feast toward in the halls of the Co. Trimble had a "nose" for a feed that was like unto that of a bloodhound.

"I—I say—" murmured Fatty Wynn at last.

Figgins gave him a ferocious stare. He was not going to lose School House votes on account of Fatty's unearthly appetite.

"Care for kippers, Trimble?" Figgys asked.

"Yes, certainly."

"Help yourself, old chap."

Fatty Wynn, with silent agony, watched Trimble help himself. He inwardly determined that Trimble's kipper should be Figgys' kipper or Kerr's kipper, not his one.

To his unspeakable wrath and amazement, Trimble calmly transferred all three kippers to his plate.

"This is awfully good of you fellows," said Baggy, apparently unaware of the astonishment and dismay his action had caused. "But what are you fellows to have?"

"Oh—us!" gasped Figgins.

Fatty Wynn uttered an inarticulate sound.

"We—we've got something else," said Kerr feebly.

"I say, these kippers are good," said Trimble, with his mouth full. "Pass the pepper, Wynn. What? Did you speak?"

"Nunno!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

He looked at Figgins and Kerr eloquently as Trimble tucked in. They avoided his glance.

"About the election, Trimble," remarked Figgins carelessly, as he tackled the war-bread.

"You go ahead, and tell me your views," purred Trimble. "I'm rather busy."

Trimble was more than rather busy. He was very busy, with three kippers to get through. Figgins explained his views willingly. He pointed out that the Fourth wanted the best man as skipper, and that the higher patriotism required a chap to think of the Form and the School, and not specially of his own House. Trimble nodded assent to all his

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remarks. During Figgy's oration Trimble made only one remark, and that was to ask if there were any more kippers.

Fatty Wynn sat and munched warbread, with feelings in his plump breast that could not have been expressed in the English language. Even German would hardly have done them justice.

Trimble was looking very shiny when he had finished the kippers. But, like Alexander of old, he was ready to conquer new worlds.

"I'll try the cake," he remarked. He tried it. Fatty Wynn, regardless of the laws of politeness to a guest—and, indeed, Trimble was rather a trying guest—secured a chunk. But Baggy accounted for the rest.

"That's a good cake," said Trimble. "I'm glad you think so," remarked Kerr sarcastically. Kerr hadn't tasted it.

"Pass the jam, old fellow." Fatty Wynn was beginning to look homicidal. Trimble wired into the jam. It was a three-pound jar, and the Co. had intended that jar to grace the festive board for days and days to come. So far as the jar was concerned, they could still do as they liked, but as for the jam, that was ladled out on Trimble's plate in heaps, and disposed of with a spoon.

"What I like is plenty of jam," Trimble confided to the petrified Co., as he scraped the last out of the jar with a tablespoon.

"I—I'm glad to hear it!" gasped Figgins.

"Did you say there was another cake, Figgy?"

"Nunno," "Sorry!" said Kerr, with immense sarcasm.

Trimble rose to his feet. The table was bare, and Trimble was very shiny and sticky, and Fatty Wynn was sunk into the deepest depression.

"Well, it's settled about the election, I suppose?" said Figgins. "I've got your name down, Trimble."

"My name?" repeated Trimble. "Yes, as a voter for me."

Trimble moved a little nearer the door. "The fact is—" he remarked.

"Well?" said Figgins, beginning to look dangerous. Trimble had eaten the Co. out of house and home, and all that was not going for nothing.

"The—the fact is—" Trimble sank his voice confidentially. "You New House chaps haven't a chance of getting in, you know. Not an earthly. No good one of you setting up as candidate."

"Wha-at?" "But I can introduce you to a chap who pays five bob each for votes," said Trimble, with a wink.

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"I won't mention his name for a moment. Fair's fair! If I introduce you to the chap, you stand me a bob out of each five. That's fair play. What do you say?"

Figgins & Co. did not say anything. They couldn't.

"Well?" asked Trimble. "That's a fair offer, you know."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins feebly at last.

"You—you toad!" stuttered Kerr. "You—you led us to suppose you—you were going to vote for Figgins. What do you mean by your gas about a fellow voting for the best man, irrespective of his House?"

"Yes, that's all right. I meant, you New House fellows can vote for a School House chap."

"You fat idiot!"

"Where's that cricket-stump?" roared Fatty Wynn, looking frantically round THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 532.

the study. "Where's that stump got to? Where—"

Baggy Trimble decided that it was time to retire, and he did.

"Hold on, Fatty!" stuttered Figgins, as the fat youth started for the door, having found the stump. "We've been fairly spoofed!"

"Yes, I'll hold on—to Trimble's neck!" said Fatty Wynn ferociously.

He rushed out of the study, gripping the stump.

A minute later there was a wild uproar on the staircase. When Fatty Wynn came back into the study he was flushed and breathless, but he looked as if he had been enjoying himself. But Baggy Trimble, as he crawled into the School House afterwards, could not help feeling that he had paid for that free tea in the New House.

CHAPTER 7.

Many Candidates.

TOM MERRY & Co. came out of the School House smilingly after tea.

The Shell fellows were interested, in a lofty and patronising way, in the great affair that was absorbing all interest in the Fourth Form.

They did not take it seriously. From the lofty height of the Middle School

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Buy a 15/6 War
Savings Certificate
now—in five years
you can draw £1
for it. Particulars
at any Post Office.

they affected to look down on the Fourth as mere fags. They refused to admit that the Fourth had any right to a Form captain at all, their attitude probably being dictated by a desire to pull the leg of the Fourth generally.

The list of candidates was to be posted up in the New House, as a New House prefect had taken charge of the business. This was rather a score for Figgins & Co. A crowd of School House fellows went over with the Terrible Three—most of them Fourth-Formers, but a good many of the Shell, too.

They found Figgins & Co., and Reddy and his friends, and, in fact, nearly all the New House Fourth, gathered round the notice-board. The paper was not yet posted up.

"Bai Jove, not waddy yet!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass on the board.

"Just like the New House!" grunted Blake. "Slack!"

"Perhaps it's the paper shortage," suggested Monty Lowther. "Monteith mayn't have found enough paper in the house to hold all the names."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Wats!"

"Silly ass!" snapped Blake. "What are you Shell-fish doing here, anyway? This isn't your bizney."

"Kick 'em out!" suggested Pratt. "Peace, my children!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We're only lookers-on. We sympathise with everybody, and we hope that all the Fourth will have good luck, and get in as captain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly Shell-fish—" "Hallo! Here comes Monteith," said Manners.

"Shush!" murmured Figgins. The juniors "shushed" respectfully as the Sixth-Former came along, with a paper in his hand.

He pinned the paper on the board and retired, still smiling, and the juniors crowded round to read it. There was a gasp as they read it, for it ran:

"LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR ELEC- TION OF FORM-CAPTAIN, IV. FORM.

JOHN BLAKE.
THE HON. ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.

ROBERT ARTHUR DIGBY.
GEORGE HERRIES.
RICHARD JULIAN.
RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW.
ERNEST LEVISON.
SIDNEY OLIVE.
PATRICK REILLY.
BRUCE MACDONALD.
RICHARD ROYLANCE.
MICHAEL MULVANEY (Minor).
CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS.
GEORGE FIGGINS.
RICHARD HENRY REDFERN.
PERCIVAL PRATT.
ADOLPHUS DIGGS.
WILLIAM T. ROBINSON (Minor).
RICHARD CLARKE."

The juniors simply blinked at that lengthy list. There were almost as many candidates to be voted for as there were voters left to do the voting. Tom Merry & Co. roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Plenty of captains!" chortled Monty Lowther. "The Fourth Form will be well led. But will there be anybody to follow the leaders?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Even that ass Tompkins!" chuckled Manners. "And Diggs! Well, the more the merrier. I shall come to see the election."

The Shell fellows walked out, laughing, leaving the Fourth-Formers staring at the list and at one another.

"Bai Jove! This won't do!" said Arthur Augustus at last. "I trust you fellows see now the necessity of silly asses standin' down!"

"Set the example, as the biggest ass present!" suggested Redfern.

"Weally, Wedfern—" Jack Blake snorted.

"Figgins is being backed up in his own study, at any rate," he said wittingly.

"Yaas, wathah! And I must remark that it is wathah wotten for you fellows not to back me up in the same way."

"Fathead!" "I wufuse to be called a fathead, Blake!"

"I'll tell you what," said Cardew, "I've got a suggestion to make."

"You can make it," grunted Blake.

"Well, why not withdraw your claims, and vote for me?" said Cardew blandly.

"That will solve the difficulty, won't it?" "Ass!"

"Chump!" "Fathead!"

"Well, I can make another suggestion," grinned Levison. "Vote for me!"

"Go and chop chips!"

The School-House juniors walked out of the New House, most of them in an exasperated mood. An election with as many candidates as voters was farcical, and they all felt that it would not do. They explained to one another quite warmly that nearly all of them ought to stand down. All agreed upon that, but

not upon which fellows ought to stand down. That was the knotty point. Figgins & Co. were equally busy in the New House, trying to bring their House-fellows to reason. But the New House candidates seemed to be in an unreasonable mood; and that night, in the dormitory, several of them showed signs of damage, which seemed to indicate that arguments had been very warm. In both Houses, in fact, arguments were very warm, but quite unconvincing; and on the morrow the list still stood.

CHAPTER 8.

Monty Lowther Takes a Hand.

MONTY LOWTHER wore a thoughtful expression.

Tom Merry and Manners observed it, and they said simultaneously:

"Don't!"
"Eh? Don't what?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Keep it for the Comic Column in the 'Weekly,'" said Tom Merry, imploringly.

"That will save you going over the back numbers of 'Chuckles' for your little jokes," remarked Manners.

"You ass!" roared Lowther. "I never—"

"Well, hardly ever!" grinned Manners.

"Look here—"

"What about a trot out this afternoon?" asked Tom Merry.

"I was going to say—"

"Yes, I know you were," agreed Tom. "But keep it for the 'Weekly.' Now, the weather's fine this afternoon, for once—"

"Look here, it's a wheeze."

"Of course. That's why we want you to keep it. Don't waste it on us, old chap!" beseeched Manners.

Monty Lowther looked wrathful for a moment. The humorist of the Shell did not always receive the keenest appreciation in his own study. But Monty Lowther was a stickler when he had a little joke in hand.

"Shut up, and lend me your ears," he said. "My idea is—"

Groan!

"Shut up, I tell you!" shouted Lowther. "It's a wheeze. I think we ought to take a hand in the Fourth-Form bizney."

"Bless the Fourth Form!" yawned Manners. "Can't waste time on fags. I'm going out with my camera."

"Hang your silly old camera! There's a big meeting of the School-House Fourth in the Hobby-Club-room this afternoon. Blake has called them together, to get it settled who's going to be School-House candidate, and stop splitting the vote."

"A good idea, if it could be managed," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I expect it will end in a row. They don't want help from the Shell."

"My idea is that they do," answered Lowther firmly. "The way these fags are getting their ears up won't do. Might as well have a lot of Bolsheviks here, and have done with it. Besides, they've got a fire in the club-room."

"Well, there's usually a fire there in cold weather," said Tom. "We had a fire for the meeting last night."

"That was our meeting, and this is only a meeting of fags. I don't approve of wasting coal on fag meetings in wartime."

"Look here, what are you getting at, Monty?" demanded the captain of the Shell. "Cut off the gas, and get down to bizney."

"Open your ears, and close up your jaws, then. You know there's a big, old-fashioned chimney in the hobby-club-room. It goes right up to the roof, with



Baggy is Affectionate!
(See Chapter 5.)

openings in it in the rooms above, from the chimneys there. There's a lumber-room over it."

"Well?"
"Easy enough to get into the chimney from the lumber-room."

"My only hat! What do you want to get into the chimney for?" exclaimed Manners.

"To block it up, of course."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I think that will conduce to the harmony of the meeting, and cause general satisfaction—perhaps. What do you think?"

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

"Well, it would be a lark," remarked Tom.

"You see, we wait till they're all in, and fasten the door outside," said Monty Lowther. "We can tie the handle with a whipcord, across the passage. Then they'll be bottled up. When the smoke thickens, they will find it very entertaining—if they've got any sense of humour. It will be a lesson to them—in fact, it ought to lessen their cheek."

"Ow!"

"Well, is it a go?" demanded Lowther.

"As kind schoolmates, we're bound to do something to assist the deliberations of the Fourth."

"It's a go!"

Having come to that decision, the Terrible Three strolled away to the Hobby Club-room, an apartment in a rather secluded corner of the rambling old building. It was a half-holiday, and the School-House Fourth were using it for the purpose of a meeting to bring about what Jack Blake rather grandly called "national unity." How much unity was likely to be brought about was a question; but it was certainly a good idea. Unity, according to Blake, meant backing up his claim; but other Fourth-Formers had quite different ideas about unity.

The School-House Fourth were already gathering. Study No. 5 were there, and Levison & Co. and several more. Roy-

lance and his friends came in, followed by Dick Julian and Reilly and Kerruish. The Fourth-Formers looked rather suspiciously at the Terrible Three, who stood smiling in the doorway.

"You Shell-fish can clear off!" snapped Jack Blake. "This is a Form meeting, and no strange dogs are allowed on the premises."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Mustn't we listen to the eloquence?" asked Monty Lowther. "Mustn't we vote for anybody? We're prepared to vote for all the candidates, if it takes us a week."

"Clear off!" roared Herries.

"Buzz!"

"Shift them out!" exclaimed Reilly.

Tom Merry & Co. sauntered away. From a distance they watched the rest of the School-House Fourth gather, till every fellow was in the club-room, even to Baggy Trimble and Melish.

Blake slammed the door after the last Fourth-Formers were in the room, and turned the key in the lock. He did not want any humorous interruptions from Shell fellows who did not understand how serious the proceedings really were.

The Terrible Three smiled as they heard the key click in the lock. Monty Lowther strolled down the passage, and attached a cord to the door-handle, drew it taut, and fastened it to another door-handle. Then the Terrible Three departed, smiling.

But the meeting in the Hobby Club-room were not thinking of the Shell fellows. There was business to be done.

"Now, we're all here—" said Blake.

"Better appoint a chairman of the meeting," suggested Levison.

"That is all right, Levison—I am chairman," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Give a chap a look at that fire," said Baggy Trimble.

"Wats!"

"It's jolly cold here," said Trimble.

"Damp, in fact. Get away from that fire, D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus was standing in a graceful attitude with his back to the fire. Baggy Trimble gave him a shove, and took his place, much to his wrath. Baggy was a slacker, and always felt the cold more than active fellows.

"Bai Jove! Pway postpone the pwoceedin' a few minutes, deah boys, while I thrash Twimble!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"Order!"

"I wufuse to ordah—"

"Dry up! Order! Now, about the chairman—"

"I wepeat that I am chahshman, Levison!"

"Any old chairman will do," said Cardew. "Let's get to bizney! Put some coals on the fire, somebody!"

"Put them on yourself!" roared two or three voices.

"There's no tongs here," answered Cardew.

"Well, you cheeky ass, can't you soil your silly fingers as well as anybody else?" snorted Herries.

Cardew shook his head.

"Thanks, no!"

"I rise to a point of order," said Julian. "Cardew can't soil his fingers. I suggest postponing business until Cardew has mended the fire."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, by gad!" ejaculated Cardew, rather dismayed.

But Julian's suggestion was adopted at once. The juniors gathered round Ralph Reckness Cardew, and the dandy of the school was hustled towards the fireplace.

"I—I say!" he protested.

"Go it!" said Jack Blake grimly.

"Yaas, wathah!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "There is such a thing as a chap havin' too much cheek, Cardew, deah boy!"

"Look here, I'm not goin'—"

Three or four pairs of hands were laid on the Fourth-Form dandy. Cardew struggled, and looked for help towards his chums. But Clive and Levison were laughing, and they did not offer to help.

"Go it!" grinned Clive.

"Rub his head in the coals!" said Smith minor.

"Hold on!" yelled Cardew, as his head was bent down towards the coal-box. "I—I'll mend the fire, if you like."

"Buck up, then!"

In a very gingerly way Cardew selected knobs of coal with his white fingers. By the time he had finished mending the fire, his delicate hands were not quite so white.

"That's better!" said Blake, with a grin.

"What am I goin' to clean my hands on?" growled Cardew.

"The back of your neck, if you like!"

Try your hair!" chuckled Dig.

"I'll try yours!" answered Cardew.

"Hallo! Gerroff! Why, you rotter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Another postponement was necessary while Dig and Cardew were separated. Then the proceedings proceeded. Arthur Augustus took the chair.

"Gentlemen—" he began, order having been restored.

"Hold on!"

"I wufuse to hold on, Woylance!"

"Chairman appoints the speakers; he doesn't jaw himself," said Roylance.

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove! I do not wecognise that wul! I wufuse—"

"Order!" bawled Blake. "Chairman jaws last, if anybody's ass enough to stay and listen to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen—" began Roylance.

"Weally, Woylance—"

"Gentlemen—"

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"I do not select you as speakah, Woylance," said Arthur Augustus acidly. "I call upon Contawini to address the meetin'."

"Shut up, Roylance!"

"Go it, Contarini! On the ball, Jackeymo!"

"The Italian junior grinned.

"Signori, me place—"

"Talk in English, you ass!"

"Signori, I stand corrected. It is wiz great pleasure I address meeting. I give you good tip. In the present food-shortage—"

"What?"

"I recommend you to try macaroni as an article of diet. You will find that it is very healthful and strengthening—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a food-economy meeting!" bawled Herries. "Look here, I'm going to address the meeting."

"Weally, Hewies, as chahshman—"

"Gentlemen, I'm standing as captain of the Fourth!" roared Herries.

"Time you sat down, then!" said Roylance; and he hooked his leg in Herries' with the result that Herries sat down with a loud bump and a louder roar.

"Yaroooh!"

"Order!"

"Gentlemen," said Cardew, "I beg you to take notice that I'm offerin' five bob each for votes, and I call on you all to rally round."

"Rats!"

"Shut up!"

"Look here, this ain't a bear-garden!" shouted Blake. "We've got to get the matter settled at this meeting."

"The School House has got to stand together as one man, and make sure of a School-House skipper for the Fourth."

"Hear, hear!"

"Think what would happen if a New House boulder got in. What we want is unity. That's patriotic. Back me up—"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah, wats! I call upon all the fellows pwsent to back me up! What is required is a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"I say, it's getting jolly smoky here!" exclaimed Clive.

"Oh, bother the smoke!"

"The smoke's bothering me. There's something wrong with the chimney."

"Bless the chimney! Now, gentlemen, I—"

"Pway allow me to remark—"

"Dry up!"

"Bai Jove! I weally cannot stand this smoke!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as a black volume poured from the chimney and fairly caught him. "Oh, gwoooh! What evah is the mattah with the fiah?"

"Groogh!"

"Ugh!"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was pretty evident that something was wrong. The fire was burning thickly, and the smoke, instead of going up the chimney, was pouring out into the room in black volumes. The meeting began to gasp and cough and splutter and rub their eyes.

"By gad! I'm not standin' this!" exclaimed Cardew, and he made for the door. "Hallo! What's the matter with this thumpin' door?"

"It's locked, you ass!"

"I've unlocked it, fathead, and it won't open!"

"Oh, you're an ass!" exclaimed Blake, and he pushed Cardew aside, and grabbed the door-handle, and dragged at it.

But the door did not open.

"Well?" said Cardew sarcastically.

"Ahem! It really won't open!"

"Bai Jove! I weally cannot stand this smoke! Gwoooh!"

"Atchoo!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The room was thick with it now, and there was a general rush to the door. But the door remained shut, and the Fourth-Formers gathered round it, sniffing and coughing and snorting frantically.

CHAPTER 9. Rough Justice.

"O H, cwombs!"

"Groogh!"

"Gerroooh!"

"What evah is the mattah with the door?"

Blake gave a yell.

"Those Shell beasts! They've fastened it!"

"They've blocked up the chimney!" howled Levison. "You can get at it from the upper room! They're smoking us out!"

"Oh, the rotters!"

"Groogh!"

The black volumes of smoke were growing blacker and thicker. The room was swimming with blacks.

Every corner of the room was full of curling smoke, and eyes were red, and all the meeting coughing as if for a wager.

Blake ran to the window, and threw it open. The unhappy meeting gathered round the window, gasping for air.

A dense volume of smoke rolled out into the quadrangle, and it caught the eyes of Mr. Latham, who was walking in the quad. He hurried to the window.

"Bless my soul! Is there a fire?" he exclaimed.

"Groogh! Chimney's out of order, sir!" gasped Blake.

"You should not have a fire in the room if the chimney is out of order!" exclaimed the Fourth Form-master severely. "Bless my soul! I must see to this at once!"

Mr. Latham hurried round to the door.

"Bai Jove! He will find the door fastened now!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

But a sharp eye was watching from an upper window, and by the time Mr. Latham reached the Hobby Club-room the whicpord had been removed, and there was no sign of a fastening outside the door.

Mr. Latham threw open the door, and strode in.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

"What an exceedingly dense smoke!"

"Groogh!"

"You are utterly reckless! The chimney might have been set on fire!" said Mr. Latham. "I fear that you have been playing some absurd prank here!"

"The chimney's blocked, sir."

"Nonsense! The fire is drawing quite well!"

The juniors blinked at the fire. The smoke was no longer pouring into the room, but up the chimney in the usual way.

The juniors could guess that the obstruction above had been withdrawn; but Mr. Latham did not know anything about that.

"What have you been doing here?" he exclaimed sternly.

"N-n-nothing," sir. The—the fire began to smoke," stammered Blake.

"Nonsense!"

"It was those Shell—" began Baggy Trimble, and then he stopped with a yell, as somebody tramped on his foot.

"Yaroooh!"

"Trimble! How dare you utter such ridiculous noises in my presence!" exclaimed Mr. Latham angrily. "Silence, sir! Blake, the fire could not have smoked in such a way of its own accord. Some foolish trick has been played here. Such tricks are dangerous. All of you go away at once!"

"We—we—"

"I shall lock the door!" said Mr. Latham severely. "If you cannot hold your meetings without these foolish tricks, you must not hold them at all!"

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Latham shepherded the juniors out of the Hobby Club-room, and locked the door, and walked away with the key in his pocket.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Blake. "What are we going to do now?"

"I'm going to have a wash," remarked Cardew.

"By Jove! That's a good idea!"

"Look here! There's the meeting to—"

"Oh, blow the meeting!"

Most of the Fourth-Formers streamed off to get a wash—and they needed it. As soon as their ablutions were over, quite a number of the Fourth started out to look for Tom Merry & Co.

But the Terrible Three had wisely gone out for the afternoon, and they were not to be found.

In the quadrangle, however, Blake and his friends met Figgins & Co., and stopped to look at them. Figgins had a dark shade round one eye, Kerr had a very red and swollen nose, and Fatty Wynn several signs of damage. The New House trio had evidently been in the wars.

"Bai Jove! You fellows been mixed up in a dog-fight?" inquired D'Arcy.

Figgins grinned rather sheepishly.

"We've had a meeting in the New House," he said. "I've been trying to bring the fellows to reason, and avoid splitting the vote."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I ever came across such a crowd of unreasoning asses!" continued Figgins, warmly. "There's that ass Reddy setting up as Form captain, you know! And Digs and Pratt—"

"Just the same on our side!" growled Blake. "Silly, conceited asses setting up for election—"

"Bai Jove! I never expected to hear you confess that you were a silly, conceited ass, Blake—"

"I was talking about you fellows!" roared Blake. "Figgys is being backed up in his own study, at least! A fellow ought to back up his own study!"

"That is what I have been pointing out to you several times—"

"Oh, cheese it, fathead!"

"What a happy family!" grinned Fatty Wynn. And Figgins & Co. sheered off, leaving Study No. 6 engaged in a heated argument.

Cardew bore down upon them, and interrupted the argument.

"I've got a proposal to make to you fellows—"

"Take it away and bury it!"

"My idea is that there should be a vote taken in the School House for the House candidate," persisted Cardew. "Then we shall present a united front to the enemy. Majority of House votes selects the candidate."

"Bai Jove! That's not a bad idea!" Blake assented. It really was a good idea.

"Good egg!" he said. "That will settle it. And it's understood that all House votes go to the candidate selected by the House. We'll put it through at once!"

The School House Fourth were called together again—in the Common-room this time. Cardew's suggestion was generally approved, and the Fourth-Formers agreed to vote for the candidate who was selected by a majority to represent the School House in the Form election.

Then the selection took place.

To the astonishment—and certainly not the pleasure of the meeting—Cardew secured the majority of votes. He had

three; the rest of the votes being divided in one and twos. Cardew's supporters were Baggy Trimble, Percy Mellish, and Harold Bates.

"Bai Jove! It's Cardew!"

"Rootten!"

Cardew smooed sweetly.

"It's understood, I put up as School House candidate for captain of the Fourth, and the whole School House vote backs me up?" he said.

"Ye-es," said Blake slowly.

"Hold on!" said Roylance. "How did Cardew get his votes?"

Blake gave a jump.

"Oh, my hat!" He seized Trimble by one fat ear. "Trimble, what are you supporting Cardew for?"

"Yarrah! Five bob! Leggo!"

"Gwreat Scott! This is bwbwew and cownpwn!"

"Mellish, you worm!"

"Here, hands off!" yelled Mellish.

"What did Cardew give you, you rotter?"

"T-t-t-ben bob!" stuttered Mellish.

"And you, Bates, you worm?"

Bates looked dismayed.

"Cardew hasn't given me anything. He—he's going to take me home for a week-end; but, of course, that's got nothing to do with it. I— Yarrah!"

There was a disturbance before Bates could get any further. The three corrupt voters went out of the Common-room on their necks.

Then came Cardew's turn.

The dandy of the Form was collared on all sides, and frog-marched round the Common-room and bumped on the floor, and his head was introduced into the ashes, and then anointed with ink and soot. The Fourth-Formers left him in no doubt as to what they thought of bribery and corruption in elections.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was feeling very bad when he crawled away to his study. Levison and Clive joined him there, roaring with laughter. Cardew blinked at them dismally through ashes and soot.

"Yow, ow, ow!" was his remark.

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Clive heartlessly. "What do you mean by splashing your disgusting money about?"

"Yow, ow! I meant to get selected as candidate! Yow, ow!"

"And you've got it in the neck instead!" grinned Levison.

"I—I—I'll scalp 'em!" gasped Cardew. "Look here, you fellows back me up, and I'll—I'll—"

"We haven't come here to back you up," said Clive. "We've come to tell you what we think of you for disgracing the study."

"Look here— Oh, gad!"

Bump, bump, bump!

Cardew was left sitting on the hearth-rug stuttering. And his prospects of getting in as captain of the Fourth was reduced to zero.

CHAPTER 10.

The Election.

"ELECTION NOTICE"

"The election of the Form captain, Fourth Form, will take place in the junior Common-room, School House, at seven o'clock this evening."

"J. MONTEITH."

That notice, in Monteith's hand, was posted up in both Houses at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned as they read it.

The Shell fellows had never taken the Fourth-Form election seriously; and they now took it less seriously than ever.

Nineteen candidates for the honour was a large order. There were nearly as many candidates as electors; and of

all of them not one had consented to withdraw. There were hardly enough votes in the Fourth to give them one each, and that certainly made the affair rather humorous.

The School House vote was still split, in spite of Blake's efforts to obtain unity.

So was the New House vote, for that matter. Study No. 6, generally united, were quite at variance on this subject.

Arthur Augustus declared that he would have backed up Blake or Herries or Dig with the greatest of pleasure, if it had been merely a matter of personal ambition. But it was a matter of principle.

It was necessary for the Fourth Form to secure the best Form captain going! Therefore, Arthur Augustus could not possibly withdraw. And all the other candidates took the same view.

Monteith had kindly consented to take charge of the election, and he had asked Kildare, the Head of the School House, to lend a hand. The proceedings, so far, had been of so excited a nature that it was deemed necessary for a couple of prefects to be present when the election took place.

"We'll be there!" grinned Monty Lowther, as he read the notice. "It will end in a merry dog-fight, and we don't want to miss it!"

"No fear!" agreed Manners.

"I wonder whether Monteith and Kildare will get scalped!" chortled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As the hour of election drew near, Jack Blake made a last attempt to secure unity on the School House front.

With great earnestness, almost with tears in his eyes, Blake pointed out that "United they stood, divided they fell."

But the only answer he received was an invitation to back up in support of D'Arcy or Dig or Levison or Julian, or whomever he happened to be arguing with.

The School House had not been able to agree upon nominating a House candidate. As they had a majority of votes, that would have secured the post for the House, but possibly not for the right party, for Blake would have preferred Figgins or Reddy to Cardew, or an absolute ass like Clarence York Tompkins.

Some of the candidates were certain not to be voted for at all, unless they voted for themselves; and it was very probable that the result would be a tie among four or five candidates.

Naturally, Jack Blake was exasperated at the state of affairs, which threatened to turn the whole election into a farce. But the rival candidates were also just as exasperated as Blake was.

Towards seven o'clock the electors and the candidates began to gather in the Common-room, all of them in a somewhat excited frame of mind.

The prefects had not arrived yet; but a good many of the Shell dropped in to see the proceedings. Monty Lowther remarked that it would be as good as a ginema. And the Shell agreed with him.

"Blake, dear boy," Arthur Augustus was saying, as the Terrible Three came in, "I am going to make a last appeal to your common sense, dear boy! I request you to put aside the extraordinary conceit which somehow makes you think that you ought to be Form-captain!"

"You silly chump!" roared Blake. "Are you going to do the right thing and back up your own study?"

"That's what both of you ought to do!" exclaimed Herries hotly. "I'm simply blessed if I can understand such conceited asses!"

"The three of you beat me!" grunted Dig. "When you've got, under your

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very eyes, a fellow who's simply cut out for Form captain—

"Fathead!"

"Wah!"

"Now, look here, Roylance"—Sidney Clive was the speaker—"you're simply bound to back up a fellow-Colonial—"

"I was just going to say the same to you, Clive!"

"Now, don't be an ass!"

"Well, don't you be a silly ass, old scout!"

"Why not chuck it and vote for me?" inquired Cardew, sauntering in with his hands in his pockets.

A general howl greeted Cardew.

"Rats! Who bribes the voters?"

"Go home!"

"Look here! Cardew's not going to stand!" exclaimed Mulvaney minor.

"We bar bribers, bedad! Kick him out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kick out that fat rotter Trimble, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Kick one another out, all of you, and let's have some quiet! Go it!"

"Bai Jove! What are those Shell boundahs doin' heah? Chuck them out!"

"Outside, you rotters!"

"Cave! Here come the prefects!"

Kildare and Monteith came into the Common-room together.

The shouting ceased, but there was still a buzz of excited voices.

"Now, then, order!" said Kildare, good-humouredly.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Kick those Shell-fish out!" roared Digs.

"Outside!" said Kildare. "You're not in this! For goodness' sake, keep quiet, you kids; you can be heard all over the house!"

"Can't we stay and look on, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry. "It's a cure for war-worry watching a Fourth-Form election."

"Rate! Shell fathead!"

"Hustle 'em out!"

"No; get out!" said Kildare, laughing. "Now, then, sharp's the word!"

And the Shell fellows were turned out into the passage. But they remained there laughing; and belated Fourth-Form voters who came hurrying in had to run the gauntlet. Figgins & Co., when they arrived from the New House, were bumped in the passage before they got into the Common-room. This led to a foray on the part of the Fourth and a battle in the passage, till Kildare and Monteith brought their ashplants into play, and the disturbance was quelled.

Unfortunately in the scrimmage both the prefects received some thumps not intended for them. Kildare looked less good-humoured now, and Monteith looked decidedly bad-tempered.

"For goodness' sake, let's get this rot over!" exclaimed Monteith.

That was not a remark calculated to soothe the savage breast.

"New House ass!" called out a voice from somewhere.

"What? What's that?"

"Ahom! Never mind!" said Kildare hastily. "Now, then, candidates this way!"

The greater part of the Fourth Form surged over towards Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's stared at them.

"I said candidates!" he snapped.

"We're candidates."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite a numerous family of us!" grinned Cardew.

"Oh, they're nearly all on the list of candidates," grunted Monteith. "I was an ass to have anything to do with it."

"You always were an ass!" called out another voice.

"By gad! I—"

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"Silence!" shouted Kildare. "Now, you young asses, sort yourselves out! Are there any electors as well as candidates?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Stand back, Cardew! You're not standing!" roared Herries.

"Yaas, I pwotest against Cardew—"

"Kick Trimble out! Trimble's been bribed!"

"And Mellish, too! And Bates! We'll give him week-ends with Cardew!"

"Look here—"

"Order!" roared Kildare. "Shut up, the lot of you! Now, then—"

"Rats!" came a New House howl.

"Who are you? School House duffer! Yah!"

"Shut up, young Pratt—"

"Kick Trimble out! I tell you—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Order!" shrieked Monteith. "Let Trimble alone, Macdonald! Blake, you young ruffian, let go, Cardew! Oh, my hat!"

"Bai Jove! I weally pwotest—"

"Keep order, you School House cads!" roared Figgins. "Can't you behave yourself? Give them the ashplant, Monteith! They're only hooligans!"

"Bedad, and I'll give yez hooligan!" howled Mulvaney minor, grasping Figgins round the neck.

"Gerroff! Oh! Ah! Yah!"

"Hands off, you School House worm!" shouted Fatty Wynn, dragging at Mulvaney minor's collar.

"Hands off yourself!" yelled Reilly, seizing the fat Fourth-Former, and rolling on the floor with him.

Kildare gasped. Monteith scowled.

Both the House captains were sorry by this time that they had taken a hand in the Fourth Form election. Really, the state of affairs left something to be desired, from the point of view of law and order.

"Will you be quiet?" shouted Kildare.

"I'll give you something to yell for!"

Monteith was laying on with his ashplant already.

But there was no chance of restoring order. Rival candidates, and rivals of New House and School House, were fairly letting themselves go, and excitement reigned supreme. It was in vain that the two prefects attempted to restore order. Perhaps by mistake—and perhaps not—Monteith and Kildare came in for a good share of thumps and lunges, of whizzing cushions and butting heads. James Monteith went down as somebody hooked his leg, with a crash, and five or six juniors rolled over him.

As they were School House juniors, it was just possible that they were taking advantage of the confusion to rag a New House prefect—a chance which, naturally, seldom came their way.

Kildare plunged in to rescue his fellow-prefect, and fell over an extended leg—possibly extended on purpose. He found a New House junior sitting on his neck the next moment.

The uproar was terrific.

In the midst of it the door opened, and Tom Merry put his head in and yelled:

"Cave! Here comes Railton!"

But his voice was lost in the din.

The House-master strode in, with a grim and frowning brow.

"Boys!" he thundered.

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my hat! Railton!"

There was a hasty scramble. Mr. Railton eyed the dusty and dishevelled juniors sternly. He fairly jumped as Kildare and Monteith extricated themselves from the swarm and angrily scrambled up, red and breathless.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, shocked and angry. "Kildare! Monteith! Is it possible that two prefects should have taken part in this—this pandemonium—"

"Grooh!"

"Oh! Ow!"

"I—I am surprised—shocked—upon my word—" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Kildare. "It—it's an election, sir. The Fourth are electing a Form captain, and—and we were—asses enough to agree to superintend for them!"

"The young sweeps were ragging us!" roared Monteith.

"Bless my soul!"

"It—it's only an election, sir," ventured Blake, dabbing at his nose.

"Merely an election for Form captain."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! Though I admit that some of these New House boundahs have acted in a wuffianly way—"

"Yah! School House ass—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Kildare and Monteith, you had better retire and leave me to deal with this."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Only too jolly glad to!" gasped Monteith.

And the two Sixth Formers promptly retired. Mr. Railton surveyed the abashed juniors sternly.

"Are you aware that this disturbance was heard all over the house, and even reached your headmaster in his study?" he exclaimed.

"Ahem!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You appear to have been holding an election for a captain of the Fourth Form," said Mr. Railton. "Since these are your election methods, I forbid you to do anything of the kind again!"

"Oh!"

"Every boy present will take two hundred lines!"

"Oh!"

"And if I hear anything again of an election for a Form captain in the Fourth Form, I shall report the persons concerned to the Head for a flogging."

"Oh!"

"Now disperse quietly."

The Fourth Formers dispersed, under the eye of the House-master. The election was over!

Tom Merry & Co. inquired genially the next day of Study No. 6 how they were getting on with the Form captain bizney.

The reply of Study No. 6 took the form of assault and battery.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's great idea had ended in smoke. The Fourth Form at St. Jim's had to remain minus a Form captain.

Perhaps, given more time, the Fourth Form might have settled the matter in a satisfactory manner. But one riot was enough, in the House-master's opinion, and there was not to be any chance of another.

The Fourth had to rub along the best it could without a captain. Still, as Monty Lowther pointed out, in case of emergency, there were plenty of captains to come forward at a moment's notice.

In Study No. 6, it was agreed that the idea was all rot, anyway, and that Arthur Augustus had been an ass to suggest it. As Blake remarked, it was just like Gussy to go round picking up silly ideas from other schools that weren't up to the St. Jim's mark in any case. Herries and Dig agreed heartily.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"SPOOFING THE SHELL!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"SPOOFING THE SHELL!"

By Martin Clifford.

After the capital story of this week we return to the sports series with next week's yarn. But, as it happens, there is not a great deal about the athletic side of the competition in it. There is, however, what some of you will appreciate more—a gigantic jape planned by Lowther for spoofing the Fourth, and getting back the points lost by the dormitory raid. But, you may say, the story is called "Spoofing the Shell." It's! So it is. There is a reason for that, as you will find.

Read about Gussy's proposal to have a dressing competition—about how a certain member of the Shell scored a point for his side without meaning to in a smoking competition—in fact, read it all, enjoy it, and then wait for more. There is more to come. The Forms have yet to meet at cricket and on the river; there is the Marathon, and there are wrestling events. Chess, too—and

other things. And we shall hear more yet of Mr. Berrymore and of the feud of the three minors.

LIST OF TOM MERRY STORIES IN THE "GEM"—continued.

Let me warn you once again—it is quite useless asking for back-number notices just now. I have so many in hand that I am obliged to proclaim a close season. When I have cleared them off I will tell you; but it is not likely to be for some time yet.

And we have no copies of the stories of which I am now giving the titles at the office, so as to spare, that is. You cannot beg them or buy them.

Got that? Well, here goes, then, for the list.

The numbers are those in the New Series. No. 27 here would be No. 75 if the numbering had been continued as from the first.

27.—"The Head's Surprise."

28.—"Tom Merry Afloat."

29.—"St. Jim's at Sea."

30.—"The School on the Steamer."

31.—"The Wreck of the Floating School."

32.—"Skimpole's Salvage."

33.—"The Boy Detectives."

34.—"D'Arcy's Secret."

35.—"The Joker of St. Jim's."

36.—"D'Arcy's Minor."

37.—"Darrel's Secret."

38.—"The Scouts of St. Jim's."

39.—"The Fifth of St. Jim's."

41.—"The Disappearance of Wally."

41.—"The Ghost of St. Jim's."

42.—"Patty No. 2."

43.—"The Schoolboy Jockey."

44.—"Tom Merry & Co. at the Fair."

45.—"The Plot against the Head."

46.—"Tom Merry's Voyage."

47.—"Tom Merry in New York."

48.—"Tom Merry in Chicago."

49.—"Tom Merry in the Rockies."

50.—"Tom Merry & Co. out West."

51.—"The Ragging of Buck Finn."

52.—"A Lad of the League."

Your Editor.

CADET NOTES.

WE are beginning to receive notes from the commanding-officers of corps about the ads that have been sent to join their units through the medium of the GEM Library. It will, perhaps, help to encourage others to make inquiries and take steps to join a corps if we give an example of the sort of thing that is reported to us. Recently we received from the lieutenant-colonel commanding a well-known Cadet battalion a note as follows: "I have noticed that from time to time you have sent us some very good recruits. One especially is now a sergeant and a crack shot." This is extremely gratifying to us, and most encouraging to other lads who may desire to join up with the Cadet Movement. Applications for information, etc., should be sent to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C.2, and will receive immediate replies.

The very rapid promotion and excellent achievements in the direction of shooting accomplished by the lad referred to in the foregoing note ought to inspire confidence in other new members, and those who are thinking of joining the Cadets. There is no sphere where the motto "THOROUGH" is more appropriate than to such a movement as this, and if lads who join these corps would, so to speak, go at it tooth and nail, they would find that in a very short time they would be secure promotion and to become leading members of their units. We have pointed out before how valuable this may be to them subsequently, if it should prove that the war continues long enough to require their services in the Army. They could practically be sure of early promotion to non-commissioned rank, and in many cases, to still further honours and advancement.

Many of the inquiries received at the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments from lads desiring to join Cadet Corps unfortunately come from towns or districts where there are no units at present in existence. We do what we can to assist in promoting the formation of a corps in such places, and have pointed out before how useful it would be in such cases if applicants, instead of writing individually, would get a group of a dozen or so lads to join with them in sending a letter stating that they would join a corps if one were formed. In many cases already this has been done, and we are glad to say that we continue to receive letters signed jointly by a number of boys from various parts of the country.

Here is, for instance, an example of the sort of thing we are receiving, and which is most useful to us. The following letter is from a reader in a small provincial town, and was received quite recently. He says: "I have got the names of thirty-one boys who are willing to join if a Cadet Corps were

formed here, and we think we might be able to get a few more after the corps is formed. Kindly let me know what arrangements could be made, as we are all anxious to know." This is a useful piece of work, which boys in other places where no corps at present exists, might well take up. It is easier for them to get their friends and acquaintances to join in making an application in this way than it is for us to get into communication with the boys individually.

In response to the many inquiries received with reference to the admission of lads under military age to the Royal Flying Corps and R.N.A.S., we have already mentioned that recruiting of such members is suspended for the present. We understand, however, that it is intended to reopen recruiting for this purpose in the course of a few weeks, probably about the beginning of May, and that after that date boys of 16 or so may again be accepted in the Royal Flying Corps if their physical condition and other qualifications are satisfactory. Any of our readers anxious to enter the Royal Flying Corps should note this, and defer their applications until, say, the end of April, when we would do our best to deal with any further inquiries sent in.

An active recruiting campaign in connection with the Cadet Movement has been held in Bradford recently. Meetings were held, and the Cadet Recruiting film of the Central Association was shown at the various picture-houses in the city, and other steps were taken to increase the strength of the movement. Youths from 15 to 17 years of age are wanted for the corps, though it is intended to admit boys of 15 or so if they are of the necessary standard in height and weight. The members will be provided with uniform, equipment, and rifles as soon as these can be obtained, and it is intended to attach a company of the Cadets to each battalion of the Volunteer regiment. The city is divided into four areas, so that boys residing in any part will have a company close at hand. Our readers in Bradford should note this and join the movement.

When the Prince of Wales was in Glasgow recently he visited, among other places, the shipbuilding yard of Messrs. Stephen & Sons, Limited, Linthouse, where a guard of honour was furnished by the Linthouse Company of the 2nd City of Glasgow Cadet Battalion. This company is recruited entirely from lads in the firm's employment, and during the last few weeks it has more than doubled its members. The battalion is affiliated to the Cameronian Scottish Rifles, and is thus linked up to a regimental history of great deeds and noble services. It is about to adopt the kilt as part of the uniform of the corps.

The movement in Scotland also is making good progress, and we notice that at a meet-

ing of the Renfrewshire Territorial Force Association recently it was announced that official recognition had been granted to three companies of the Boys' Brigade in Gourock, and also to a Cadet Company in Paisley, to be affiliated to the 1st Battalion of the Renfrewshire Volunteer Regiment. This is excellent news, and our readers in Gourock and Paisley should note it, and take steps to become members of the corps referred to.

All the units of the various Liverpool Cadet Corps, numbering in all some 2,000 lads, were reviewed on the St. George's Hall Plateau recently by General Sir Robert Scallan. It was a fine sight, and General Scallan presented the St. Phillip's (Litherland) winners of the Lucas Tooth Competition for efficiency, with the medals they have gained. After inspecting the well-drawn-up lines of youthful soldiers, the general stood on the steps and took the salute of the companies as they marched by. The splendid bearing and fine marching powers of the boys were the objects of general commendation.

Efforts to form new Cadet Corps in places where they do not at present exist, or where those existing do not cover the whole ground, are being taken up in many parts of the country. Among others we note that the Yorkshire County Territorial Force Association is desirous of raising a battalion in Leeds, and the Lord Mayor of that city and others interested in the welfare of lads are taking up the project with enthusiasm. A meeting is to be held, and steps are being taken to raise the £2,000 necessary for equipping the proposed battalion. At Newcastle also the Volunteer Battalion has drawn up a scheme for a Cadet Corps, and they also propose to issue an appeal for funds to defray the cost of uniforms, etc. We hope our readers in either of these cities will note this, and join and support the movement if they can do so.

In Birmingham, a correspondent tells us, the 1st Cadet Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment has eight centres for training. Any would-be Cadet should apply by letter to the commanding-officer, Lieutenant-Colonel L. C. Secker, Aston Barracks, Witton, Birmingham, who will be pleased to put him into touch with the nearest centre to him, where facilities will be afforded him for enrolment.

From Jarrold-on-Tyne another correspondent writes to point out that the Church Lads' Brigade, or the K.R.R.C., to give the brigade its present title, forms the largest Cadet force in the country. It is open to lads of 14 and upwards. There is also a junior branch—the C.B. Training Corps, or the Incorporated Church Scout Patrols, for younger lads, from 10 upwards, who naturally pass into the K.R.R.C. on reaching 14.

THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 532.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 10.—Jack Blake.

YOU may call him "John," if you like. No doubt he was christened in that name. But none of his friends ever think of calling him "John," so I don't think I would if I were you. We are all Blake's friends, I am sure.

He is a fine, manly specimen of British boyhood—something like Tom Merry, something like Bob Cherry of Greyfriars, something like Johnny Bull. I should not say that he was quite so gay and sunny as the great Bob. He is hardly as consistently good-tempered as Tom, though his temper is quite decent. His little habit of growling without meaning much by it is very like Johnny, and the two are more than ever alike when they speak out. There is nothing half-hearted or doubtful about them when they are moved to that; they have an uncompromising directness of statement that leaves the hearer quite sure what they mean. But I doubt whether the two could ever be such chums as D'Arcy and Tom. There is a tremendous difference between Blake and Arthur Augustus makes them all the better friends. They look at nearly everything that does not matter very much in different ways. But when it comes to things that do matter—loyalty, straightforwardness, courage—the two stand shoulder to shoulder.

It would not be at all a good thing if everyone were cast in the same mould. Too many fellows like Gussy would mean a fine harvest for the spongers and the swindlers. He is too soft-hearted, his sympathy is too easily enlisted. Blake is not at all like that. As ready as his chum to make a stand against tyranny, to help a fellow down on his luck, Blake is practical, like most Yorkshire people, and he wants to be pretty sure before he lets his sympathy go out. I should say that he is not at all a bad judge of character, either. He may be wrong sometimes, but he is not in much danger of refusing to help where he ought to do so, and quite certainly he is in far less danger than Gussy of giving help to rotten wasters or of being taken in by selfish grabbers.

There is no dreaminess in Blake's nature. He has as much commonsense as anyone at St. Jim's or Greyfriars. He seldom does anything that surprises so much, because one knows what to expect from him. That is not to say that he is all on the surface, only that he is much the same all the way down; whereas in the cases of many other fellows you find them revealing at times feelings you would never have expected, doing things that are hardly consistent with most of what you know of them. These are complex characters. Levison is one of them. Cardew is another. Then there are Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, and Lumley-Lumley. You may say that this is only because of the mixture of good and evil. But it is more than that. There is that mixture in everyone. And in fellows in whom the good is certainly far stronger than the evil—in Harry Manners and in Frank Nugent, for instance—you may have noted this unexpectedness. Mr. Clifford and Mr. Richards knew human nature. That explains it.

Blake was at St. Jim's before Tom Merry. But some of our favourites were there before him. Herries and Digby were, and so were Figgins & Co. When Blake came to the gates of the school he was met by three boys, one of whom was half a head taller than the others, somewhat lanky in form, and fair-complexioned. Another was a small, stocky fellow with red hair. And the third was a short, thick-set boy, with a fat face. You recognise them all, I think? In case you have any doubt, however, I give their names—Figgins, Kerr, and Paddy Wynn.

They were disposed to rag Blake when they heard he was School. His addition, but Herries came to the rescue—a ruddy-complexioned youth, with a masterful manner. Blake was put into the study which Herries and Digby shared, and Herries didn't want

him there, and they fought. They have been staunch chums ever since, with Dig for a third, and a little later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coming in as a fourth in the comradeship.

That first story appeared as far back as 1896, before the "Gem" was in existence. In the second yarn the story of how Blake scrambled home in a paperchase, with Herries in a fainting condition on his back, just in front of the fleet-footed Figgins, was told.

You have already learned that the Tom Merry yarns began at Clavering. But the scene was soon shifted to St. Jim's, and Blake was one of those who saw Tom arrive in his velveteens. He had discarded them before that; but Miss Fawcett had intervened, and had seen to it that he went to his new school in the clothes that she thought he ought to wear. And, naturally, Blake and the rest thought him as soft as the Clavering fellows had thought him at the outset; and like the Clavering fellows, they soon found out their mistake.

Blake did not fancy a kid in velveteens in the School House, and by liberal use of calcium carbide he convinced Miss Fawcett



that the drains there were in a bad state. The study, which he showed her as Tom's habitation for the future, certainly smelt badly enough to suggest something really dreadful in that way. So Tom was put into the New House at his kind, fussy old guardian's request; and Blake & Co. chortled, an ever Figgins & Co. were exceedingly. But it did not last long. Tom took his proper place, and when Blake & Co. had to clean up the study they did not feel quite so sure that the calcium carbide notion was an absolute stroke of genius.

It was Tom Merry's idea that the Terrible Three, Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. should form the Triple Alliance. They ran an entertainment together, and it ended in awful ructions. And the Triple Alliance was

heard of no more. Mr. Clifford says at the end of the story. It might not be; but for all that it lasted, though without name. Each of the little band of brothers—the Fourth Form trio in the New House, the Terrible Three, and the chums of Study No. 6—has the firmest faith in each of the others, and as chums counts them only less dear than the actual members of its own particular brotherhood. All of which does not in the least mean that House feuds and Form feuds are mere pretence. It is war, but with honourable enemies, who in time of trouble can be reckoned as friends.

There were no end of japes in connection with that triangular feud in those old stories. Hampers mysteriously disappeared, fellows were captured and locked-up; bumpings, free-fights, and all that sort of thing were frequent. And the merry game still goes on in the same way, and the foes are the best of friends at heart through it all.

Jack Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. stood by Tom. Herries was loyal, as did Manners. Lowther was away at the time—when he was expelled, and went into camp. Blake was as certain as anyone of Tom's guiltlessness. And when trouble arose through the scheming of Jerrold Lumley-Lumley later on, Blake did not believe Tom guilty. He had taken a strong line, as did Manners, in conclusion of the Outsider in the footer eleven after his brutal fouling of Kerr, and went so far as to stand out himself in protest. Herries, Dig, and Kelly joining him. But he was not to blame for the quarrel with Tom which followed. Who ever heard of Blake saying things behind a fellow's back that he dared not say to his face? Tom should not have thought it of him. In point of fact, Blake had expressed himself as certain that the charge was untrue. But Tom was hardly his normal self.

They fought in deadly earnest—a long and a stern fight between two fellows both came to the last, both the bitterer because of the breaking of a friendship that had lasted through many stormy times. And Blake was thrashed in the end. But everyone's sympathies were with him; and Tom had a hard time of it, supported only by the faithful Wally and his rag contingent.

That was not one of the fights that are necessary to put an end to bad blood between two who ought to be friends; one can easily see how things might have come right without a fight at all. But there are such fights, with the combatants' better feelings after them than they have ever been before. And in this case I think a real increase in the mutual respect and affection of Tom Merry and Jack Blake might be dated from their conflict. Blake is far too good a sportsman to have any resentment against Tom for the licking he took, thought it must have been good for him.

There is no mistake about Blake's sportsmanship. He is keen on the rigour of the game; but he is chivalrous, too. He will not give an opponent an advantage that he should not have; but he will seek no unfair advantage himself, and he knows how to be generous when the circumstances call for it. He is a fine all-round athlete—cricketer, footballer, boxer, swimmer, oarsman, runner, jumper. There is nothing he does not do well and in good style. He has brains, too; not particularly brilliant brains, maybe, but good, serviceable ones, well above the average.

This week we read of an election for the captaincy of the Fourth which turned out to be a farce, because about half the Form wanted the place. But really there are only two possible candidates for it. There might be a third, but one knows that Kerr would never consent to be put over Figg's head. The two are, of course, Jack Blake and George Figgins. I am not sure which would be the better of the two. My inclination is for Blake; but I don't know that I could explain why. And when I reckon up the

many fine qualities of that sterling good fellow, George Figgins, I begin to waver. But of one thing I am certain—that no one else, not Gussy or Herries or Dig, good fellows all, not capable Dick Redfern, not Cardew or Levison or even Roylance, though the New Zealanders are of those who have the leader's qualities—not one of them all, I say, has as good a claim as Blake or Figgins. I except Kerr; but Kerr did not stand, and would not stand against Figgins, though no doubt he would against Blake were Figgins out of the question.

There are lots of things one might talk about Blake. He has played a big part—but not so very often the leading part—in many stories. But I do not know that these things would go far to show his character, which is a very easy one to read; and, as I have already said, these articles are not intended to be a mere hash-up in brief of old stories.

But one may recall here Blake's trouble with the sour-tempered Mr. Ratcliff, which ended in that gentleman's being locked-up in a cage at a circus, though it would certainly not have ended there could Ratty have obtained evidence as to the offender; how Blake was taken in by Kerr made-up to represent the uncle he had never seen—a yarn, oddly enough, entitled "Jack Blake's Plot," which may serve as an instance that even in the "Gem" we do make mistakes sometimes—Blake showing his true moral courage by going to Kildare with the story of the plot was Lumsley Lumsley and Mellish against Tom Merry, and thus playing no small part in its frustration; Blake made prisoner by Cousin Ethel as a Girl Scout; and the dogged determination which led in the end to the capture of "Jack Blake's Hun."

A real good fellow, this, with a nature as clear as crystal; a loyal chum; loving a

jape as well as anyone, and ready with a jest; full of courage; active and enduring; straight-spoken; the sort of fellow who looks you in the eyes every time, and will not pretend to like you if he does not—in short, a good, typical English schoolboy of the best sort.

Yes, I mean English! I am not going to call Kerr British, or Reilly, either. Kerr is Scottish, and Reilly is Irish. Put the three together and call them British, if you like; but don't insist, even if you are a Scot, on Blake's being called anything, but what he is! English! Stands Yorkshire where is it? While it stands so Yorkshiremen are Englishmen, past all argument!

No. 11.

ROBERT ARTHUR DIGBY.

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Galsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Pousonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon and the rest of the nuts, and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon and is knocked senseless just as the warning "Police!" is heard. Flip comes to himself in a cellar, bound hand and foot. He is let out, however. He makes up his mind that the only thing for him to do is to run away, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazeldene, who has run away from Greyfriars. He goes to Highcliffe in the night, and sees the Caterpillar. He and Hazel sleep under a haystack, and, after buying caps—the school caps being unsafe—get breakfast at an eating-house.

The Fugitives.

THE man who had sold the caps passed through again, and looked at the two.

"You'll know us when you see us again, cocky!" said Flip.

Hazel stared. His comrade had spoken those words in a tone quite unlike his usual one. And now Hazel remembered that he had spoken in the same way in the shop. His voice sounded coarser.

"Pardon! I had no intention of staring, my boy," said the tradesman.

He went out. Flip and Hazel also went. Outside they saw him lingering, as if unable to make up his mind about something.

"I think we're, and think we're not," said Flip. "I'll settle him."

He walked straight up to the man, and asked:

"Can you tell me the way to Courtfield, gov'nor?"

"Oh, yes! Are you going there?"

"Well, it looks rather like it, don't it?" returned Flip.

"Round to the left there into the High Street, straight on out of the town, and then a mile or two before you come to a signpost, which will direct you by the shortest road."

"Thankee!" said Flip. "It's a goodish step, I suppose, now?"

"The best part of ten miles."

"Ah! We ought to get there by dinner."

"Looking for a job?" asked the man.

"Not exactly. More like going to onc."

"Oh! I might have found one for one of you if your references are good."

Flip shrugged his shoulders.

"I reckon you wouldn't see payin' munition works rates, would you?"

"Well, hardly. So you're on munitions?"

"Somethin' like that."

"Lack to you, lads! It's work that wants doing."

"That's so, gov'nor. Thankee again, an' good-day!"

Thoughout Flip had kept up that rough manner of speaking, and there seemed little doubt that his device had succeeded. Two boys going to Courtfield to get munition jobs could hardly be two runaway schoolboys from the Courtfield neighbourhood.

The man stood looking after them as though he were still a trifle puzzled. Then, glancing round as they turned the corner, Flip saw him go into the eating-house again.

"You don't mean to take the Courtfield road, do you?" asked Hazel.

"Rather! Flip went out of the town, anyway. If we can strike a railway-station, we'll put a few more miles between us and this part of the country; but we must go out the way he expects us to, for he isn't dead easy in his mind yet."

"That was jolly smart, Derwent!" said Hazel.

"Easy enough!" replied Flip. "We had to have the caps, but I knew it was risky getting them. We know now that something about us has got round. Lucky we didn't see a policeman! This chap was after the reward himself, I should think. He hasn't a telephone at his shop, but he knew there was one at the eating-house, and he spotted us there. He'd have had a better chance of catching us if he'd gone somewhere else to ring up, because after he had done that and given Greyfriars and Highcliffe his name and address he could safely have called the bobby in to do the rest. But he isn't much in the line, I should say, and he put us on our guard."

"Put you, you mean!" replied Hazel. "I didn't think of it. I feel too stupid and muzzy in the head to think of anything."

"Try! Have a shot at the map, and think of the nearest big station that we can strike. I think it had better be a big one because there will be less chance of anyone noticing us, and there may be a place where we can get a wash."

Hazel thought hard.

"I know!" he said at length. "It's a good long way—a dozen miles at least—but it's the best I can do at the moment. If we take the next road going to the north we should be in the right direction, and that's going away from the district we don't want to touch, too."

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Flip. "What's twelve miles? We can do that on our giddy heads!"

They could do it on their feet, at least; but Hazel's feet were very tired when at length they came in sight of the station.

Not a Very Gay Time.

"READY for some grub, Hazel?" asked Flip.

"I'm almost too tired to eat," replied the Greyfriars junior wearily.

"Can't say I feel like that. I say, you know, this may be an important junction, and all that; but it wasn't quite the sort of place I thought of. There doesn't seem any sort of town handy. Why, hang it all, I know the place now! It's where I fought Galsby!"

"I don't see that that's anything much against it," Hazel said, ill-humouredly.

"Did I say it was? All I mean is that it isn't really busy enough for us to be very safe there. But if there happens to be a pub or a shop closed at hand, so that we can get some bread and cheese to keep us going, we needn't stay about here long. Let's go up and have a look at the time-tables, and make up our minds where we'll go first, though."

Hazel did not object to this, and they went up. The junction stood in rather low-lying country, and the rails ran in each direction ran along the top of an embank-

ment, so that when they had reached the platforms they had a view along the roads on both sides.

A trap, with a black horse between the shafts, was bowling along towards the station on the road by which they had come. Hazel looked hard at it. Then his face went white, and he gave something like a moan.

"Quechly!" he said. And he sank on a seat, and covered his face with his hands, as if he had already given up all hope of escape.

"So it is," said Flip. "And if I'm not mistaken, that's Wingate in the seat behind. We must get out of their way, old chap."

"It doesn't matter to you," Hazel said sourly. "They can't take you back."

"I rather think they would, if they got half a chance. But they aren't going to have a chance," Flip answered, not at all downcast. "Quechly's eyes are pretty good ones at close quarters, I should say; but I doubt whether he can see as far as we can, and I don't think he can as far as he has recognised us."

"But what can we do?" asked Hazel helplessly.

"Oh, come along with me!" said Flip. Hazel followed, dragging his feet. He was almost inclined to throw up the sponge.

More than once afterwards Flip wondered whether it would not have been better to let him go to it.

But he never even thought of that at the time. He was tired, too; but the indomitable spirit in him would not let him give in as tamely as this. He had no feeling against Mr. Quechly or against Wingate; but for the time being they were the enemy, and, because of that, to be beaten if possible.

He dodged out through a side gate into the goodsyard.

"Cover here," he said, with a cheerful grin. "We could dodge them quite a long while among these waggons and motor-lorries."

"Yes, I feel like dodging them!"

Hazel's reply was almost a snarl. Certainly Flip was not exactly the companion one would have chosen for such an adventure as this. He was rather worse than none at all. But Flip did not lose his temper with the sulky fellow.

"No need for it, as it happens," he said. "Nobody about. Dinner-time, I suppose—I feel as if it were, anyway. Let's get into one of these trucks."

He led the way up a short flight of steps to the raised goods-shed, into which the lines ran for convenience of loading. A long row of trucks, the loading of which was apparently complete, stood there; and if only room could be found it would be the simplest thing in the world to slip into one of them, and hide under the tarpaulin.

"We're caught without a chance of a bolt if they find us inside!" growled Hazel.

"Well, how far do you think you could

run with that long-legged bounder of a Wingate after you?" inquired Flip.

They had to look into half a dozen trucks before they found one in which there was room to stow themselves. But they found one at length, and scrambled inside, and pulled the tarpaulin over them.

"Beastly stuff, and not room to stir a muscle," said Hazel fretfully.

"Shush!" said Flip.

Heavy footsteps sounded below on the raised platform which made the floor of the shed. A voice spoke.

"I wanted that, Mr. Craggs—had. I did. This 'ere loadin' is dry work."

"I wanted it, too," said another voice, not so rough. "But, my word, Binkies, what stuff it is they give you in the name of beer these days!"

"Beer's beer!" said Binkies gruffly. "I've 'ad all sorts in me time—except 'had. There's beer which is better nor other beer—that, Mr. Craggs, I ain't denyin'. But 'ad beer there ain't—not as I ever found, anyway."

"I don't think what we 'ad at the Ram was worth riskin' a rap over the knuckles from the stationmaster for," said the other voice.

"Goods clerk and porter—been for a drink together," whispered Flip.

"I've got ears, haven't I?" returned Hazel unobscuredly.

It did not appear likely that the scrap of dialogue they had overheard could have any bearing upon their fortunes. But so it was.

Other voices were heard now, and Hazel trembled as he recognised Mr. Quelch's familiar tones.

"I felt sure that I saw two boys on the platform," said the Greyfriars master.

"Quite possible, sir; though they are not there now, or in any of the waiting-rooms. They might be in hiding somewhere round here," answered another voice—that of the stationmaster, as they could easily guess.

"We're done!" hissed Hazel.

"Lie still, you potty ass!" whispered Flip. "Have you seen two boys about, Craggs?" the stationmaster asked.

"No, sir," replied the voice which had complained of the beer.

"Have you, Binkies?"

"Boys, sir," asked Binkies, in tones of surprise that would better have fitted the occasion had the query concerned two alligators or two polar bears.

"Yes, boys!" snapped the stationmaster. "Bless the man, he's seven of his own, sir—four of them in the Army—and you might think—"

"Oh, boys, sir, that's what you mean!" broke in Binkies. "No, sir, no boys round 'ere. I'd soon 'ustle the young wabagones off!"

"You have been here all the time, of course?" said the stationmaster. "Neither of you is due off for dinner till two o'clock."

"I've been here since nine, sir," answered Craggs. "And Binkies was here when I came on."

"That's so, sir," said Binkies. "As touchin' me, 'owever, sir, you wouldn't be meanin' that red-headed young imp from Frogley's Farm, I s'pose? I can't abide that boy, nohow! But there's only one of him, thanks be, an' I understand as you want two."

"I'm glad you understand—something, Binkies!" snapped the stationmaster. "Really, I don't think the boys could have got in here to hide without Craggs seeing them, sir. Binkies is a fool, though he can't help it; but Craggs has some intelligence."

"It hardly seems possible," replied Mr. Quelch.

"That's a nasty one!" Craggs must look an awful idiot!" whispered Flip.

"He didn't mean anything about Craggs. He meant about us. Oh, I say, Derwent, I wish they'd go!"

They were going. Their voices sounded more distant, and then died away.

"It was the only thing to say, Binkies," remarked Mr. Craggs nervously.

And Flip and Hazel knew that remark that Mr. Quelch and the stationmaster had passed out of hearing.

"Binkies grunted. If Mr. Craggs' tender conscience hurt him at all, quite certainly the conscience of the parent of seven boys—and an unknown number of girls—was not troubled."

"We can't move yet," said Hazel, in a low tone.

"As I figure it out," replied Flip, "the only possible way of getting safely out of this station is to stay where we are until the truck goes."

"What, it may be ever so long hours!"

"That's true enough, too."

"And we're no grub!"

"That's so."

"And we don't know a bit where we shall be taken to, or how long it will be before we can get out!"

"Quite right, Hazel!"

"My hat!" It ticks me how you can keep so beastly cheerful!"

"Not much good grinning, is it? See here, when you did a bunk did you fancy it was going to be all violets?"

"Of course I didn't, you idiot!"

"Well, I can't see what you're disgruntled about, then. Things might be heaps worse."

"I'm so beastly empty," replied Hazel sulkily.

"Oh, hang it all, that's like Bunter! I like my grub well enough, but when you can't get it you've just got to go without. Shush now! The fairy feet of Binkies approach."

It was quite a long time before they had a chance to talk again. And then they were forced to shout at one another, for an engine had come along and towed the trucks out; and then there had been some shunting, and now they were on their way, though they did not know the least in the world whither.

Hazel yelled something in Flip's ear.

"What? I can't hear! Don't shout so much, but speak distinctly."

"Derwent, I'm a worm!"

"You're not, old chap!"

"Yes, and you've stood by me like a real chum, though there isn't a scrap of reason why you should feel a bit friendly to me. And all the time I've done nothing but grouse and moan while you have got us out of difficulties. You've the money, too. What do you put into the partnership?"

"Yourself, old man! And you don't think that I can't see that you're badly under the weather, do you? There's some excuse for you."

"I've been treated badly. No, I'm not sure that I have, really. But it comes naturally to me to think it's anybody's fault rather than my own."

"Other way of looking at it pays best. Better chance of putting things right so."

Flip said, with the unconscious wisdom that came to him at times.

"Well, you won't watch me like this again," Hazel said.

"Right ho, old chap!"

But Flip did not feel so sure of it as he would have liked to be.

Goggs at Highcliffe.

"M V hat!" gasped Yates of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe. "Is it alive, or is it just a stuffed figure?"

"It seems to be able to walk," said Smithson dubiously.

"That may be the wicks inside," replied Benson. "There's simply no end to what they can do in that way now. My brother Walter, who lost a leg over there, fighting the Huns, says the new one they have fixed him up is better than the old one ever was, and don't ache when he gets tired, you know."

"That's only old Walter's pluck," remarked Smithson, who knew Benson's soldier brother. "Lots of them are like that. They're so cheerful about what they've been through and what they've lost that my mother says it fairly makes her cry to hear them talk. I don't see why it should, myself; but women are rum."

The three Fourth-Formers were standing at the Highcliffe gates, looking down the road. "It was a fine, clear day, though quite cold enough," But Smithson & Co., who went out for plenty of exercise, did not feel the cold at the nuts did."

Something—or, rather, someone—was approaching along the road. In spite of their gibes, the three really had no doubt at all that it was a human being, without even a wooden leg. But it certainly did look like a nut!"

It was Johnny Goggs, and that somewhat eccentric youth was the happy possessor of a face and figure that suited his whim for making himself appear the limit in weirdness. He was no fool. His rather simple face did not reflect the real shrewdness of his brain. There was actually something like a touch of genius in Goggs; but nothing about him suggested it, even at normal times.

At such times, without the disfiguring glasses which concealed his bright blue eyes, he was a very plain, ordinary enough look-

ing boy, who appeared all skin and bone. And the glasses—let Johnny be in one of those moods when what he desired were all things to be taken for a complete fool, in order that he might have the pleasure of proving afterwards that he was nothing of the sort—let him, in that mood, look as simple as he could, and dress the part—and you had what Smithson, Yates, and Benson saw."

But Smithson, Yates, and Benson were decent fellows. They kept down their inclination to giggle in the face of Goggs, and replied quite civilly to the question he addressed to them.

"I beg your pardon, but is this Highcliffe?" he asked in a high-pitched voice.

"No need to beg our pardons—it is," answered Smithson.

"Has been ever since it was built," added Yates.

"And is likely so to continue," rejoined Benson.

"Eh?" said Johnny Goggs, putting a nervous hand to his right ear.

He had heard perfectly well, and nothing he heard had displeased him, or given him at all an unpleasant impression of these three.

But he had expected to be asked. His appearance, invited it, and when he had landed at Frankingham Blount, Trickett and Waters, now his special chums, had been far less civil than these fellows were.

"My hat, it's deaf, too!" said Smithson.

"Eh?" repeated Goggs.

"Don't mention it," replied Smithson, grinning. "Sorry we have no car-trumpet handy, but this is Highcliffe!"

"Highcliffe?" repeated Goggs, as if hardly understanding yet.

"That's it," yelled Smithson.

"Thank you. I am a new boy. You, I presume, are some of my future school fellows?"

"My only painted Aunt Mary Matilda June!" said Yates.

"Did you mention your aunt? I have no aunt, but I have an uncle," Goggs said, beaming upon him.

"And the father cousin of the gardener's wife has a tame monkey," remarked Smithson.

"Do you mean this is it?" inquired Benson.

"Well, I dunno. Better ask it, perhaps."

"My name is Goggs—Johnny Goggs—continued the new boy."

"And don't be just look it," said Benson.

"I only know one boy at this school," Goggs went on, appearing to take their sympathy and patience with him for granted. "His name is Gadsby. Gadsby's father, a nature my dear grandmother has been known to say that I am a candid even to a fault. So I do not mind telling you that I am not pleased at the prospect of meeting Gadsby again. I do not consider him a very nice boy."

"Same here!" grinned Smithson.

Goggs seemed to hear that, for he smiled and nodded.

"It will not be necessary for me to be friendly with him, I apprehend," he said.

"It won't be possible," answered Yates, with conviction.

"Fon & Co. will rag this poor thing bald-headed," Benson said.

"Unless we look after it," Smithson agreed.

"Is it worth while?" asked Yates, considering Goggs with a critical, but not entirely hostile, eye.

"I've seen worse, if it wasn't so deaf and so silly," replied Smithson.

Goggs continued to beam upon them.

"May I inquire your names?" he asked, his voice more high-pitched than ever. "Do not think me unduly inquisitive, I beg. I like your faces. You are not handsome, and of you—"

"Oh, by jingo!" ejaculated Yates, who rather fancied himself.

"But you have good, plain, honest faces," went on Goggs. "I think I could be friendly with you; though, of course, I have no wish to intrude."

Smithson, Yates, and Benson looked at one another in rather a queer way. No one of the three quite liked to own it to the other two, yet it was a fact that all three had an impulse of liking towards this extremely weird specimen. It may have been that, in their direct goodwill and honesty there was something that answered to the real Goggs behind the mask of foolishness.

Or it may have been that they rather liked his admission that he had no taste for Reginald Havers Gadsby, whom all three barred most completely.

(To be continued.)